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SELF'S THE MAN

A TRAGI-COMEDY

BY

JOHN DAVIDSON

"Admirably adapted for the stage."—*Glasgow Herald*.

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The scene of "Self's the Man" is Lombardy, and the time may be referred to the eighth century A.D.; but it is a modern drama—a not altogether unsuitable sub-title might be "New Wine in an Old Bottle," for some part of the comedy is a fermenting anachronism which bursts the wine-skin. Counterparts of Urban, the protagonist, may be found in Napoleon III., Dom Pedro, Amadeus of Spain, Alexander of Bulgaria, Milan of Servia, poets, students, or pleasure-seekers attempting or half-attempting to act, and to be masters of men. Urban embodies the prevailing mood of the nineteenth century, which was, like most centuries, an age of dreamers and unrealized ideals; and he represents also the net result of the intellectual effort of the nineteenth century, viz., the conscious egoism which inevitably exalts the mind above the soul and the senses, and destroys the natural harmony of man. Lucian, Urban's rival, is the same modern type in a lower key—the viola to Urban's violin. Bismarck, Stambuloff, may be considered the antitypes of Hildebrand, the true contrast to Urban—agents who proceed instinctively, knowing nothing of themselves, and who can overcome everything except assassination or a youthful emperor. Thrasimund, the pantaloon of the piece, is typical of the confused ambition and frantic luxury of our time. The two heroines, one willingly submissive to the yoke of slavery, the other to the yoke of convention, bear a relation to each other like that of Urban and Lucian—Osmunda alto to Saturnia's soprano. Fate, such as may be found within the covers of books, will not be detected anywhere in this play; only character, and the want of it, and the use or abuse the individual makes of the chances that occur.

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With this number the format will be changed. The series will be continued in octavo volumes.

THE KNIGHT OF THE MAYPOLE

THE KNIGHT OF THE MAYPOLE

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

JOHN DAVIDSON

“Lord of May, and Lord of May again.”

An Unhistorical Pastoral.—1877

LONDON

GRANT RICHARDS

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1903

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“Let the May-queen reign.”

Fleet Street Eclogues.

This play was written in 1900, and after various adventures is now published, twenty-five years having come and gone since, in “An Unhistorical Pastoral,” I first wrote of the Maypole.

J. D.

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PERSONS

- CHARLES II. King of England.
- SIR HENRY BEAUMONT . . .
SIR CHARLES ALDRED . . .
SIR GILBERT HAMILTON . . . } Courtiers.
- ANTHONY ASHE, of Sutton-
Highcroft } Justice of the Peace.
- GABRIEL ASHE Anthony's cousin.
- EUSEBY TRENCHARD Anthony's man.
- CLEMENT DORMER Mistress Dormer's son.
- ISAIAH MYRTLE A Roundhead.
- JEREMY STRUTT Mistress Dormer's cousin.
- HUMPHREY A ploughboy.
- MESSENT
MOWLEM } Country Constables.
- AGNES GREY { Daughter of the last Keeper of
Richmond Court Palace.
- MISTRESS DORMER A wealthy widow of Richmond.
- JUDITH RUMBOLD Mistress Dormer's niece.
- GRACE MYRTLE Isaiah's daughter.
- JANE GOSLING A milkmaid.
- Courtiers, Mayers, Morris-dancers, Roundheads, Two Pipers,
a Horn-player, and a Taborer.

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SCENE.—Act I. *The Hall of a Manor-house, near Richmond.*

Acts II and III. *Richmond Green.*

Act IV. *The King's Apartments, Richmond Court
Palace.*

TIME.—1661. *The First Act takes place on the 30th of April;
the remainder on the 1st of May.*

THE KNIGHT OF THE MAYPOLE

ACT I

SCENE.—*The Hall of the Manor-house of Sutton-Highcroft, Richmond, lofty and spacious. Tudor and early Stuart portraits, arms and trophies of the chase on the walls. In the centre a long table of carved oak, upon which are law-books, papers, silver standish and quills. At the head of the table a high-backed, oaken chair. Other chairs placed conveniently.*

A deep bay-window of stained glass opens upon a lawn at the back.

On the right is a high, carved mantelpiece: fire-dogs in the chimney. On the left a carved doorway corresponding with the mantelpiece. A small door on the right below the fireplace.

When the curtain rises ANTHONY ASHE is discovered reading the Intelligencer in his chair at the top of the table, and EUSEBY TRENCHARD near the foot of the table cutting a quill.

Anthony.

NO news, Euseby? You have marked nothing.

Euseby. There is nothing deserving your worship's regard.

Anthony. What private or parish matters bore us this morning?

Euseby. Mistress Agnes Grey despatched an express from Richmond Court to notify your worship that she will visit you this forenoon concerning the King's Maying.

Anthony. Ah! So the King comes a-Maying to Richmond?

Euseby. To-morrow, your worship.

Anthony. To-morrow, Euseby. Not yesterday; nor to-day; nor the day after to-morrow; but to-morrow. May-day, like every other day in the calendar, is only an annual occurrence.

Euseby. [*To himself.*] Except the twenty-ninth of February. I had him there!

Anthony. What else, Euseby?

Euseby. Worshipful sir, widow——

Anthony. A widow! Not a word. Bring her in. Once is enough to hear a widow's complaint. [*Glances over the Intelligencer.*] Euseby! Did you examine the shipping news?

Euseby. Most carefully, your worship.

Anthony. Come here! Read!

[*Takes EUSEBY by the ear.*

Euseby. [*Reading.*] "On April the 26th, the bark Mary Ann, of Rye, homeward bound from the Barbadoes, ran upon the Brill Rocks, and went to pieces. It is feared all hands are lost." Oh, sir! Most worshipful sir! What is this Mary Ann to us?

Anthony. [*Releasing EUSEBY.*] A suit of mourning, Euseby.

Euseby. Ah! Where was my undutiful memory? Yet the word Mary Ann seemed familiar—to beg as it were like a poor relation for a glance of recognition. But then I never even saw your worship's cousin.

Anthony. Gabriel! Umph! And I have not seen him since Worcester.

Euseby. That's ten years ago!

Anthony. The chivalrous Gabriel! He was in every royalist plot till his affairs grew desperate. Then he shipped before the mast—which was fortunate, as he would infallibly have brought me into trouble. He was one of your “no compromise” men, and could never adapt himself to the times.

Euseby. Unfortunate Master Gabriel! Drowned on the doorstep, so to speak, sir. Your worship has no consanguinity remaining, lineal, collateral, or sinister. My most humble, heartfelt condolence. This loss must mean——

Anthony. The sure possession of Sutton-Highcroft, mine by nine points of the law, but Gabriel's by testament; peace of mind besides, Master Euseby, now, henceforth and for ever—if the news be true; and that I shall know presently. Bid Tom Patchin saddle Anchorite; and in the meantime admit the ranting widow.

Euseby. She is no ranting widow, sir.

Anthony. Let her be whatever widow she likes, admit her.

Euseby. She is not alone, sir. She brings——

Anthony. Will you never learn that obedience, prompt and silent, is the only propitiation of a patron!

[EUSEBY admits MISTRESS DORMER and CLEMENT by the door on the left. MISTRESS DORMER is a widow of forty; CLEMENT, a youth of seventeen.]

Euseby. The widow Dormer and her son, Clement, your worship.

Anthony. Mistress Dormer! [*To EUSEBY.*] You impudent knave! How often have I told you to announce my friends at once!

Euseby. [*To himself.*] How often did I try to do so! Touched him there.

Mistress Dormer. It is the justice I come to see, not the friend. And cut I am to the heart that I must divide the sheep from the goats—I may call the justice the goats, and the friend the sheep—for I had thought that even in death they should not be divided, whatever might happen afterwards. It is my boy, Clement, here, who is breaking my heart—and some of the commandments. I give him more money to spend than the housekeeping comes to; and he may marry his quatre-cousin, Judith Rumbold——

Clement. Cousin Judy!

Mistress Dormer. Ungrateful boy! A lady, a hand-

some lady! Well set-up, with a wide knowledge of men and things, and three hundred a year of her own in lands and houses; and not yet thirty——

Clement. Now, mother——

Mistress Dormer. Not yet thirty! and I dare you to contradict me, sir! Twenty-five or so, come Michaelmas; and dotes on him. Will he look at her? Not although she wooed him on her bare knees! But he filches ten gold pieces, crown gold, that I kept in a pipkin for a purpose; and he buys of Master Ellwand, the haberdasher, eight yards of turquoise silk, and has the same made up to measure by Farwig, the woman's tailor of Mercer's Row. To whose measure, sir? And who took the measure? And who has the skirt and hood? Naughty boy!

Anthony. Come, Master Clement, I wager it was for your cousin Judith. Eh?

Mistress Dormer. No, indeed! Here is the note which I had from Master Farwig, and the girth is eighteen inches. Thank heaven, Judith Rumbold's bodice holds half as much womanhood again! [*Beats CLEMENT.*] Make him speak, your worship!

Anthony. Do you know that you are a common thief, sir? Answer me.

Clement. Yes.

Anthony. And that for less than this men are hanged every day?

Clement. Yes.

Anthony. Confess the whole matter, then, and be forgiven.

Clement. The whole matter, sir?

Anthony. What light o' love wears the turquoise blue, Clement?

Clement. No light o' love, by heaven!

Anthony. Her name, then?

Clement. No, sir!

Anthony. There is nothing gallant in this obstinacy. To be a martyr is to be an eternal fool. Save your skin, Clement.—Mistress Dormer, I leave him in your hands. Make no attempt to soften him: in youth a contrite heart is mere hypocrisy; but attrition, as our casuists call it, is possible at any age—*videlicet*, Mistress Dormer, professed repentance under terror of pains and penalties.—The elasticity of the law, and the admirable irresponsibility of its administrators—all thanks to our restored and tolerant monarch!—empower us to flay you with whips, to brand you in the palm, to give you a sultry holiday in the stocks, or a cap and hempen collar and an hour's game of blindman's buff in the air, Master Clement; or each and all of these for a graver warning to the fire-new licence of our too loyal youth.—Bring his condition home to him, Mistress Dormer.

Mistress Dormer. I shall bring it home to him, I warrant you.

Anthony. Consider it, master. A whole skin may be irksome in one's teens: in any case it will mend

again; but with a broken reputation one is lamed for life.

Mistress Dormer. Oh, that I should live to see this day! But he shall confess though he were less guilty than he is.

[*At a nod from ANTHONY, EUSEBY, who has been making notes at the table, rises and accompanies CLEMENT out.*

Anthony. Well, Mistress Dormer, in what else can I serve you?

Mistress Dormer. But you would only frighten him, sir? The law cannot touch him?

Anthony. By your leave, Mistress, the law can; and I am not sure that it stands with my honour to pardon him, even if he confess contritely.

Mistress Dormer. But all that I have is his: he cannot steal from me. Sir, I dare you to do it! I shall fill the pipkin with rose-royals, angels and double crowns, and bring it into court and unsay every word I have said; and as for Master Ellwand and Master Farwig—they live by selling cloth and stitching gowns: I should like to hear them swear the contrary of any honest lie I choose to tell.

Anthony. Well, well; we shall see. Get you his confession.

Mistress Dormer. Ay, let us find out who the Jezabel is that has led him astray; then whip, hang, brand, burn and broil.

Anthony. She shall have justice, Mistress Dormer.

Mistress Dormer. And injustice, too, Master Ashe!

Anthony. We must obey the spirit of the law, Mistress Dormer.

Mistress Dormer. Spirit and letter, Master Ashe; spirit and letter! No injustice is too great for women that purloin the sons of honest mothers!

Anthony. What! would you turn marriage itself from a sacrament to a sacrilege?

Mistress Dormer. Sacrilege or sortilege, Master Ashe, I would turn the world upside down to have the judging of her! [Goes out.

Anthony. One would think this buxom widow had teeth and claws. I am the sworn foe of proverbs, but the old Christian who said, "Beware of a bad woman and put no trust in a good one," had not spent much of his time in a hermitage.

Enter, from the lawn, AGNES GREY.

Good morning, Mistress Grey.

Agnes. You know the news?

Anthony. The King will be your guest?

Agnes. My guest indeed!

A shipwrecked mariner in a desert land
Could entertain more sumptuously. No plate,
No wine, no cook, no service; half the palace
Unfurnished; and the linen cupboard full—

Euseby! Euseby! [*Re-enter EUSEBY.*] Has Tom Patchin saddled Anchorite?

Euseby. He is about it, your worship.

Anthony. Bid him stall the gelding again. I ride later. Carts and wagons, Euseby: Dobbin and Boxer, Darling, Prince, the lame piebald, and my whole household to Richmond Court!

Euseby. Mercy on us, your worship! Not before dinner?

Anthony. Eat by the way, you libel upon gluttony! For yourself, though, I advise a fast. You devour more food than two ostlers and a stable boy, and are leaner than a plough-stilt. You are overwrought with meat and drink. Give your organs a rest, and your bones may pluck up courage to put on some flesh.—Mistress Grey, will you come with me?—And Euseby, let the wenches have their best gowns, and the men their holiday suits.

[*Goes out with AGNES.*]

Euseby. So the King has come in the cadger's way!

Enter GRACE MYRTLE, a girl.

Grace. Master Euseby!

Euseby. Now in the name of all the brethren, what is this pigsny doing at Sutton-Highcroft? If your godly parent, Isaiah, could see his little pullet run open-eyed into the fox's den, Mistress Grace, the lamentations of his gossip, Jeremiah, would be but a mouthful of his outcry.

Grace. Oh, Master Euseby, I have come in search of good Mistress Dormer. She is mistaken in a thing about a gown.

Euseby. [*Referring to his notes.*] Of turquoise silk, made by Master Farwig of Mercer's Row for Mistress Judith Rumbold—twenty-eight inches waist measurement.

Grace. Not eighteen inches, sir!

Euseby. Pardon me, Mistress Grace. Judith Rumbold is twenty-eight inches, there or thereabouts; or there is no judgement in tape-lines, or honesty in Mistress Dormer.

Grace. What has my skirt to do with Judith Rumbold? . . . Oh! Oh! Master Euseby, you will not betray me?

Euseby. Me betray you, child! It would be more pertinent to inquire if Master Clement has betrayed you.

Grace. More impertinent, you mean! And, indeed, you shall beg my pardon on your knees for thinking such dishonesty. On the floor! Now!

Euseby. [*Kneeling.*] It was a mere quibble. I had no meaning, and I humbly beg pardon.

Grace. Remain as you are; you shall answer my questions kneeling. What sentence did the squire pass on Clement?

Euseby. He sentenced him to go home with his mother.

Grace. A very shrewd sentence, too. But was that all?

Euseby. Except a categorical threat.

Grace. Why, Clement is in no danger, then!

Euseby. Except the danger he was in before.

Grace. And what was that?

Euseby. You.

Grace. Booby! And so I needn't have risked coming here. I have been a heroine for nothing. But what did Clement say?

Euseby. Clement sometimes said "yes" and sometimes "no," and for the most part held his tongue. Now, let me put a question, Mistress Myrtle. What good is the turquoise silk to you? Your father would sooner see you in your shroud.

Grace. That is my little affair. But did nobody hint about me?

Euseby. Nobody. My knees——

Grace. Wait. I have another question somewhere. Oh! you talked of Judith Rumbold. What about her?

Euseby. Why, things were said about her.

Grace. Yes?

Euseby. About her waist.

Grace. Yes?

Euseby. And about her age.

Grace. Yes?

Euseby. And her income.

Re-enter AGNES.

Agnes. What? Master Trenchard a lover! I am mightily disappointed, Master Trenchard. This is not at all in character; from your birth you were ear-marked for a sober bachelor.

Euseby. [*Rises.*] From the aching of my marrow-bones
I am knee-marked for life.

Agnes. What brings my little puritan to Sutton-High-croft?

Grace. I came to see you, Agnes.—Go to your master, Euseby. I hear him calling you.

Agnes. He wants you in the yard, Master Trenchard. His worship has some charge to give you, and I undertook to send you to him. You are to be my guest at Richmond, and help me to entertain the King.

Voices. Master Euseby! Master Trenchard! Euseby, you villain!

Euseby. Coming, ladies! Coming, gentlemen! You see how I am sought after. [*Goes out.*]

Agnes. Can I help your business with the squire?

Grace. I have no business with the squire. It is true I came here in the greatest concern in the world, and without the remotest idea of what I was going to do, but now my mind is quite at ease.

Agnes. I am glad of that, puss. To be sure, you said it was me you came to see.

Grace. Well, I saw your horse at the gate, Agnes.

Agnes. Yes; and you saw me just now when I came in.

Grace. I cannot tell you—not yet. And I must be off. My father is no further away than Shepherd's Bush, buying beasts; and if he gets home before me!—Oh, good-bye!—I can tell you one thing; in spite of bolts and

snibs I am going a-Maying to-morrow. Yes! In Richmond Park.

Agnes. At dawn?

Grace. At dawn.

Agnes. Be at the palace gate, and I shall go with you, then.

Grace. Will you?

Agnes. We shall scrub our faces in the dew together.

Grace. But then I should have to tell you—there is some one coming.

Agnes. The squire, I think.

Grace. I don't mean just now. I mean—not to tell you, yet. Good-bye! I shall be to-morrow! I shall be!
[*Goes out.*]

Re-enter ANTHONY.

Anthony. All is in train; my folk shall follow you.

Agnes. I thank you from my heart. But you yourself?

Anthony. I have business in the city, and shall pass
The night there.

Agnes. [*Giving her hand.*] Till to-morrow, best of friends.

Anthony. The King should make you keeper of Richmond Court.

Agnes. Indeed, I wish he would! But nevermore
Will Richmond have a keeper. Dreadful folk
Begin to pull it down.

Anthony. I had not heard.

Agnes. Soon I shall have no home. Fathers must die
And leave their idle daughters portionless;
But to despoil old palaces that time
Would hallow and enrich with myriads
Of memories, with art of rival ages,
And beautifying hands of hours and years,
Seasons and centuries—that is my grief;
A foolish one, but intimately felt
Because I live in it.

Anthony. A twelvemonth—no?
When did your father die?

Agnes. The very week
We came to Richmond Court.

Anthony. And so it was.

Agnes. He hoped for twenty years of rest, and died
For lack of tribulation; when the cares
That seemed to press to death were lifted up,
His ready spirit took too high a leap
And lost the way to earth.

Anthony. You ne'er till now
Have suffered me to share your grief.

Agnes. Till now
I never saw myself standing alone
Bewildered at the cross-roads in the dusk.

Anthony. Is there no fingerpost to tell the way?

Agnes. Convincingly; but not the journey's end.

Anthony. No fingerpost can tell the journey's end.
But whither lead the roads?

Agnes. One leads to court.

Anthony. A dangerous road!

Agnes. So are all worldly ways.

Ladies no better born than I have been

In royal households.

Anthony. And the other path?

Agnes. It has no fingerpost.

Anthony. How does it look?

Agnes. A vagrant track that winds to no man's land.

Anthony. I am standing at the cross-roads by your side.

This vagrant path so desolate to you,

To me appears life's highway, and I see

A man and woman, wedded pilgrims, walk

In love and friendship to the tranquil end.

The woman——

Agnes. Well, the woman?

Anthony. Looks like you.

Agnes. The man—like you? Ten years ago you
swore——

Anthony. But then you loved my cousin, Gabriel.

Agnes. How can you tell that now I love him not?

Anthony. I cannot tell; but there's a likelihood.

Agnes. Anthony Ashe, I must not take your help.

I thought you were my friend.

Anthony. To you all things——

Companion, lover, slave.

Agnes. Knowing your heart

I cannot have your help.

Anthony. By heaven, my heart,
In doubt of you, spoke out against my will !
You came to me with such a generous trust—
So beautiful, so gallant, so forlorn,
I had been a man of snow had not the prime
And perfect help that men bring women, marriage,
Leapt to my mind unbidden. Pardon me !
Ten years ago you answered me, it 's true ;
But—Gabriel is dead.

Agnes. How do you know ?

Anthony. [*Showing the Intelligencer.*] The ship is
foundered and the scamen drowned.

Agnes. [*Reading the Intelligencer.*] Not certainly ; the
loss is only feared.

Poor Gabriel ! I should not know him now.
I scarcely can remember how he looked.
I think he is not dead ?

Anthony. I'm sure he is.

Agnes. You wish him dead ?

Anthony. I do, because you loved him.

Agnes. Come not to-morrow ; send me no support ;
A wooer so relentless must enjoy
No vantage.

Anthony. But I mean to make you mine.
My people, as I said, shall follow you ;
And look for me to-morrow with the dawn.

Agnes. You will not so affront me, sir ! Beware
A woman's hate.

Anthony. A childish menace, Agnes.

Agnes. Sir, I reject your help; my gates are shut,
My heart is locked and barred to you and yours.

Anthony. But by this help I help myself; for Charles
Will recompense my service: kings, who leave
A loyal lifetime in the lurch, reward
The accidents that smooth their pleasure's path.
Account it not a service done to you.

Agnes. You will not score it in your wooing?

Anthony. No!

I love you for yourself; so must you me.

Agnes. Never. I am alone then, quite alone:
No friend in the wide world?

Anthony. Lover and friend.

Agnes. They say a lover who will not take "no"
Is to be feared more than a secret foe. [Goes out.

Anthony. The love that fears and yet will tempt the fire
Is the sweet sacrifice all men desire.

[A knocking is heard at the small door.

Come in! [Enter MESSENT.] What is it, Messent?

Messent. We have taken a seafaring man in the act,
your worship.

Anthony. In what act?

Messent. In the act of entering your worship's park by
the old gate in Middle Lane.

Anthony. That is no felony.

Messent. It would be no felony in me, if I may be so
bold as to say so, or in any constable, cottager, old in-

habitant, or decent stranger ; but the man's clothes, your worship, are very felonious.

Anthony. To the roundhouse, then. I have no time to-day.

Messent. Yes, your worship. Besides his clothes, your worship, the man is mad ; he says he is your worship's cousin.

Anthony. What ?

Messent. Your worship need have no fear. Although the man is mad, yet it is a sweet-tempered madness, for he laughed when we apprehended him. These lunatics, your worship, are of various denominations ; they are not all of a madness ; some, indeed, are not so mad as others.

Anthony. A seafaring man. Where is he ?

Messent. My neighbour, Mowlem, has him without.

Anthony. Bring him in.

[*MESSENT goes out, and returns immediately with MOWLEM and GABRIEL. ANTHONY sits at the head of the table.*]

Gabriel. Anthony !

Messent. Now, now !

Mowlem. Quietly, quietly.

Gabriel. I am faint with hunger, cousin, and travel-worn,

Or I would knock these jolterheads together.

They take me for a wandering bedlamite ;

Convince them who I am.

Anthony.

Yes, when I know.

Who are you ?

Gabriel. Anthony ! There might be wrung,
Were I at ease, some meagre drops of mirth
From this uncivil error ; but you see
I am not for jesting with. Command your men
To let me be.

Anthony. That will I not. Your name ?

Gabriel. My name ?—my name ! Can I have changed
so much ?

Your voice, your face, your gesture—all are you,
Anthony Ashe, my cousin, as he was.
And I am Gabriel, and you know me.

Anthony. No ;

I never saw you in my life before.

Gabriel. Come close to me and look me in the eyes.

Anthony. This is a sturdy rogue, a dangerous man.
Give him a whipping—idle vagabond !—
And lock him up : I'll write you his commitment.
For false impersonation and for fraud
Another judge will hang him in due course.

Gabriel. Anthony ! You mean this utter perfidy ?
You dare not bear it through ! Look back ten years :
Between our hearts affection had begot
A golden time, wherein a day that passed
Without our meeting was to both of us
Immemorable as a dreamless sleep.
No thought, no hope, no history appeared
Of value till the other shared it : all

The world, the pageant of the past, the deeds
Of heroes and heroic song, sun, moon
And stars were ours—ours jealously, the mere
Adornment of our friendship, unesteemed
Except as either felt his comrade's joy
In beauty and magnificence. Discourse
Of young intelligences rapt in wonder
At mutual revelation—the great news
That mind can fathom mind!—did never rise
On loftier pinions or more deeply breathe
The inspiration of goodwill. Cousins?—friends
And fellow-deities, so intimate
Our confidences made us with the soul
Of all supreme delight! And when our hearts
Took fire with love of Agnes Grey, 'twas you,
Half boyish and half manly, and most divine,
Who built an altar in a wilderness,
Where under midnight clouds and moaning boughs
We lit a spectral flame, and swore an oath
That blanched our simple souls, to worship love,
Devotion, truth, and friendship, and abide
The choice our goddess made. To you I come,
Now that the King is home, and England free
Again for loyal hearts, to share with you,
As we agreed of old, my wealth and lands.
Here is my uncle's will; by miracle
It saved me from the wreck when I saved it:
The crew were in the yawl; their storm-stopped cries

Assailed the wildered master hanging still
Upon the maintop backstay, loath to leave,
When hotly I remembered what this meant
For you and me ; scrambled on deck and reached
My box ; rummaged the will out ; sought again
The starboard quarter—to behold the yawl
Whelmed in the sea's trough, and the unheard crew
Whipped up and swallowed by a loud-tongued wave.
At the same moment of the tempest's pride
The mainmast snapped, and in the rigging caught
As in a net, I staggered overboard.
A flood-tide and the heavy slogging waves
Bore me upon a spar half-dead to land,
Alone of all my mates saved from the deep.
Hither I begged my way, fearing to find
A stranger in our hall . . . as I have found.

Anthony. Most circumstantial ! Can you be indeed my old bosom-friend, my cousin Gabriel ? Let me see the will. [*Receives the will from GABRIEL.*] Without question, this is my uncle's signature. But you ? No ; you are like Gabriel, but you are not he. Seize him, and hold him tightly. A very miserable creature, I perceive—and cunning, as misery invariably is. You stole this deed. Having been my cousin's companion on his last voyage, and so learnt his story ; and being the sole survivor from the wreck, you devised this fraud, hoping, if you made no more of it, to sell the will to the highest bidder.

Gabriel. I cannot think you mean it. This is to try me.

Anthony. Oh, you will be tried soon enough. That you did not reckon on. Your shipmates are dead; you have, I should hazard it, no relations or friends in this country; and you knew from Gabriel that there is none alive in England except myself and Mistress Grey who can remember and who could have recognized him. I grant that these conditions appeal to the criminal mind; they seem to invite imposture: but I beg you to note that in a court of law they leave your claim unsupported by a tittle of evidence, now that I have the document you stole.

Gabriel. Agnes will know me, if love and constancy Survive below, and justice anywhere.

Anthony. Agnes? Umph! There again cunning is not cunning enough; the true Gabriel would have flown to Agnes Grey at first; not to me.

Gabriel. I know not where she is!

Anthony. My good fellow, anyone could have told you that: she lives at Richmond Court. Cunning can do much; it can be circumspect and provide for many contingencies; but it always omits to make the world over again.

Gabriel. I cannot be myself; you are not you;
And this is not the earth we are spun upon,
But some accurs'd changeling orb where hate
And all iniquity usurp the thrones
Of love, of honour, and of noble thoughts.

Anthony. This is earth's old England, the same that men have bragged about since Caesar's time. It is true

a civil war, the usurpation of a most wise and invincible conqueror, and the return of a wench-enchanted King have played the deuce with property and the minds of men. I, for example, am not by any means the man I was——

Gabriel. One truth at last!

Anthony. —not the magnanimous fop Gabriel described to you. In these times of potent change and insidious chance I watched the rise and fall of many men, and I noted that love, honour, friendship, magnanimity, and such effeminacies, were continually on the lips, and conspicuous in the ineffective conduct of those who went down—on both sides, of all persuasions; whereas the hardy, salient spirits that emerged from every catastrophe more deeply rooted in the fat soil of the world's best gifts, gratified and invigorated by the sweet air of consideration, understood instinctively that love, honour, friendship, loyalty, and the whole array of tender virtuous words are only the inventions of fools to gloze and flatter their own weaknesses.

Gabriel. This is a voice out of the nether pit!

Anthony. I applied my observation; while the Presbyterian throttled the Churchman, and the Independent snatched away the bone they fought for, I, an honest man of the world, left party alone, and established myself securely in Sutton-Highcroft—so securely, that were you in reality my cousin Gabriel, you would find it impossible to oust me. I may tell you—or remind you, if you heard

it from my cousin—that my uncle, a merchant-adventurer, bought this estate with spoil of the Spanish Main. We are a new family here; there are no old associations for a claimant to depend on. I have made myself popular with all classes; I have interest at court: here I am; here I stay. And it pleases me, for it is vengeance. This Gabriel, whom you personate, was that kind of hateful darling, beloved of old men and young girls: he supplanted me in my uncle's good graces, and stole the heart of the woman I desired. Now I possess the whole estate, of which in his maudlin and most offensive good-nature he offered me a share, and I shall shortly marry that very Agnes Grey, whose love, in his ignorance of humanity, he imagined he had won for ever.

Gabriel. Though I were buried I should have power to
rend

The leaden casket and the weight of earth
That I might smite the traitor on the mouth.

[*Freeing himself from the Constables, he seizes ANTHONY by the throat, and raises his hand to strike him, but refrains and hurls him from him. ANTHONY falls backward, and rolls over stunned for the moment.*]

Messent. Dead, as I'm a constable!

Gabriel. At Richmond Court!

[*While GABRIEL is taking a rapier from the wall, MOWLEM puts the will in his pocket, winking to MESSENT, who nods approval.*]

And who shall hold me now?
Keep back, dull dogs, or I will stretch you out
Beside your whipper-in.

[ANTHONY *recovering, struggles to his feet.*

A weapon makes

A man the master of his fate! [Goes out.

Anthony. [Attempts to follow GABRIEL, but finds himself lame.] Hold him! Hold him! The will? Gone! After him, knaves; bring him alive or dead. What do you linger for? Your places are at stake, I tell you. Find him! Find him, or I shall beggar you both for life!

ACT II

SCENE.—*Richmond Green. A tower and cupola of Richmond Court Palace are visible above the elms, and through the elms at the back a glade opens, showing a vista of woodland.*

On the right is the gateway of the palace. On the left, a seat beneath an old tree. Near the centre, a small trench with sods and earth arranged about it.

It is early morning on the first of May.

With the rising of the curtain MESSENT and MOWLEM enter at the back.

Mowlem.

AND which is the oldest tithing-man in the parish?
Messent. Why, that be I.

Mowlem. Have you no sense of your own dignity, then? Bear up. We shall catch him now. He is hereabout for certain.

Messent. Not a step more I! I am too feeble and defective; for man by night is like an owl by day.

Mowlem. Let us determine together as regards the document.

Messent. Document? Document will do. Howsoever, doxology is a more worshipful word.

Mowlem. I tell you there's money in it.

Messent. Not a farthing's worth. There's nothing now to be done but to return to the squire.

Mowlem. And be ruined.

Messent. Not an iotum! We can say that we found the document; that is, we can prevaricate, which is one of the most common and approved customs in witness-bearing. If we bring the will the squire will forgive us the way. That is my dissension. And look you, good-man Mowlem: keep your place heretofore. You stole the will and thereby unbeknowingly took the lead, which is appropriate to me, because I am the oldest tithing-man in the parish, and a well-known wiseacre and proverbial person.

Mowlem. Take you the will then.

[*Gives MESSENT the will.*]

Messent. Me the will?

Mowlem. Ay, since you lead the way.

Messent. [*Pocketing the will.*] Good!—Follow me.

Mowlem. I will, and to some purpose too.

Messent. Very well. Come to heel.

Mowlem. Shall—at my own time. To be clapped in prison with a hundredweight of iron about my wrists and ankles is no part of my progress. Do you think the squire is no wiser than his man? Go you on with the will; tell the foolishhest lie you can, and be as penitent as a truant; yet will his worship ferret the truth out with two glances and a “Now then, Messent”; and

while you are shaking in your shoes, in come I with my story.

Messent. And what would your story be?

Mowlem. That you stole the will as I endeavoured to arrest the madman; what black proposals you made to me when you revealed the theft; how I denounced you, and how you then outran me, being longer limbed than I, to have speech of his worship first, and make peace for yourself.

Messent. Keep you the will since you stole the will.
[*Returns the will to MOWLEM.*] Truly, you are a man of a very villainous mind.

Mowlem. And you of a tall and a muscular body; we could do much together. This ragged sailor is a high-spirited gentleman, and honest in his intentions; he will pay us well for the will when he comes into his property. The squire, although he would promise more, would cheat us and disgrace us in the end.

Messent. I am hungry and sleepy, neighbour.

Mowlem. And so am I, and so is he. We shall run him to earth in Richmond.

Messent. I am sure he has escaped to London.

Mowlem. Not he! you forget always that Mistress Grey, his old sweetheart, is hereby.

Messent. Ay, that's a reason, indeed; that's our sheet-anchor, the very blanket of the business, for I have been in love myself, and acquainted with passion. Let us sit down here and wait till he comes.

Mowlem. Is that all your wisdom! He dodges us, see you, while we dog him. We must take some by-way to Richmond, and there we shall find him changing his rags. Could he present himself before his mistress in a swabber's cast-off duds? Consider, neighbour! We tracked him to Farmer Jephson's, and then we lost him to find him again——

Messent. After we had trudged half across Surrey, neighbour!

Mowlem. No matter for that. We found him again, on our way back slipping out of Farmer Jephson's barn an hour before dawn. We had him, neighbour, we had him, but for your holloa.

Messent. And why should I not holloa? I am addicted to holloaing.

Mowlem. We lost him in Richmond Park; but we'll pick him up again in Richmond Town. Take my arm, constable.

Messent. Certain, I must be more tired than you, being as there is more of me; and I must be emptier and hungrier than you too.

Mowlem. Truly, neighbour, as a larder your dimensions excel mine.

Messent. Dimensions! I have no dimensions, thank God, nor any wen or wart about me! All the Messents are well-favoured and notorious, and have been any time—I was never so sleepy—since the Wars of the Roses.

[*They go out.*]

Enter SIR CHARLES ALDRED. He looks about, and takes a letter from his pocket.

Aldred. An enigma! A most extravagant rendezvous! [*Reading.*] "Ride post-haste on receipt of this to Richmond Palace. Make no debate of the tyranny of my message. Circumstances are imperative, not I. Leave your horse at the Star and Garter, and have no signs of a rider about you. Await me by the Palace Gate, if you find me not there before you. H. B." It is without doubt Harry Beaumont's writing, but I cannot fathom the meaning.

Enter SIR HARRY BEAUMONT.

Beaumont. Aldred! I saw your horse in the stable.

Aldred. I was but now concluding that either I had lost my wits on receipt of this, or else that you had lost yours when you wrote it. You have put my goodwill to an unheard-of test, and exhausted both my patience and my impatience. I am callous to all moods and emotions.

Beaumont. Oh, I shall pierce your callosities! Awhile after midnight the King began to gossip, as he will do, of his escape from Worcester, and how he had lived on bread and cheese and possets of skimmed milk and small beer, and had walked incredible distances by night in hob-nailed shoes. Someone or other, a little in liquor or so, and tired of the King's divagations, cries out, "Your

Majesty never walks by night now." "What do you mean by that?" asks the King. "Oh," says the other—for the King liked not the interruption; "I should love to walk by night with your Majesty." "And so you shall," said the King, starting to his feet. "A cloak and a hat!" he cries; "and who's for Richmond? And who will walk with me?" Incontinently the whole company called for cloaks and hats; and they may be here before the sun is an inch higher, for although we rode, they had by much the start of us. I had word of this by chance at Chiffinch's, and determining to be of the party thought you would wish to join it too.

Aldred. I warrant you! Where the court is there should the courtiers be gathered together. But what an aimless frolic it is!

Beaumont. Not so aimless neither. The King comes by night where he would have come by his own appointment in the day.

Aldred. But why should he come a-Maying to Richmond at all?

Beaumont. That is known also. Some amateur of women fired his fancy with an account of the infinite beauty and grace of the daughter of old Sir Alan Grey; she lives here alone until some provision be made for her.

Aldred. He goes a-hawking, does he!

Beaumont. And is now arrived! Listen! Let us skirt the Green by the elms and join him immediately.

Aldred. And we shall seem to come in with the others.
I would not have missed this for a dukedom. [*They go out.*]

Enter CHARLES II.—the young CHARLES, very handsome and active. After him SIR GILBERT HAMILTON.

Charles. Well, I have won.

Hamilton. I am spent, sir; and your Majesty has scarce turned a hair.

Charles. Nay; I have barely beaten you by the length of two shadows. Where are the others? I profess the air is fresh and sprightly. I am sorry we have reached the goal. [*Re-enter BEAUMONT and ALDRED.*] Ah! Harry! you here, too. Aldred! What time have we taken?

Beaumont. Some five half hours or so.

Aldred. I have had walking enough to last me till midsummer.

Charles. I could tramp it back again. [*Walks about.*]

Hamilton. Out of the earth or dropped from middle air, or have you cloaks of darkness and seven-leagued boots?

Beaumont. We are men of mystery.

Aldred. And the King allows us.

Enter a number of Courtiers.

Charles. Good morrow all! We have walked by night; and, faith, some of us look like ghosts. [*Regarding the trench.*] Here is accommodation for one at least. What kind of grave may this be, think you, Beaumont?

Beaumont. It is somewhat of the shortest for a grave.
Are your Majesty's subjects buried upright?

Charles. Upright and downright, puritan and cavalier,
we bury them all, Harry; we bury them all.

Beaumont. There is no help for that.

Aldred. A short life and a merry, then!

Charles. Merry and long, say I!

Enter GABRIEL. *It must be understood that the King's
cloak hides his ribbon and star.*

Welcome, friend! Are you the gravedigger?

Gabriel. No.

Aldred. More likely a grave-breaker.

Gabriel. No.

Beaumont. Plenipotentiary of ragamuffins?

Gabriel. No.

Hamilton. Ragpicker in ordinary at Richmond Court?

Gabriel. No.

Charles. There is a lofty good humour, a grave serenity
about your monosyllabic excellency that pleases me. I
like a blunt fellow, whether he be a severe negative-positive
yea-and-nayer like you, or an assertive careless dog who
says all he means and more.

Gabriel. Like you.

Aldred. Rascal! Know you——

Charles. Tush! How can he? What is your name,
friend?

Gabriel. I'll tell that to my friends.

Charles. What are you, then?

Gabriel. I know not. Can you tell? Can any man
Announce himself?

Charles. Your mystic meaning, sir?

Gabriel. I fear me you would never grasp it.

Charles. Why?

Gabriel. Because you are inferior by birth.

Charles. Inferior by birth?

Gabriel. Even so. To be
Of lofty rank and rich is to be bred
A fish in air.

Charles. Odd's fish, indeed!

Gabriel. 'Tis so;
And paltry creatures are made men by toil.
Shoulder to shoulder with the day and night,
The seasons and the tides, the heat, the cold,
Men grow like powers of nature, hope and fear
Of elemental things their only moods.
All night I waked, brooding upon the world.
The King himself is shadowy, unreal,
Beside the haggard peasant who foresees
Labour and pain the grave alone can end,
But cannot tell whether, when winter comes,
There shall be fire and food for him and his.

Charles. Then you announce yourself a leveller?

Gabriel. That least of all. I know not what I am!
The turbulent multitude of passions, powers,

Whims, aspirations, lusts, necessities,
The miracle of vision, speech and deed,
The glory and terror of love and hate, the soul—
Must we affront it with a hackneyed word,
Some nickname of a sect? Why even to say
“I am a man” imprisons cruelly
This nameless thing that gropes among the stars
And grovels in the deeps.

Beaumont.

Grovel and grope !

Charles. Ay, ay! Now you grow melancholy. Come,
Be merry.

Gabriel. Truly that were best for me !
I know too well that rags and melancholy
Should ever be apart. To drench poor folk
With melancholy is to pour rich wine
Into a sieve—a perfumed hippocras
That must be drunk from golden goblets chased
With images of beauty : palates dull
From coarse food cannot savour it ; its fume
Palls in a comfortless environment,
Even as a diamond in a brooch of lead
Dim like a dead eye shows.

Charles. A working mind! Well, I'm for breakfast; then to sleep till noon.

“Mad Tom is come to view the world again,
And find a cure for his distempered brain.”

How does it go ?

“ In angry mood he met old Time
With his pentateuch of tenses ;
And now he wanders night and day,
To find his straggling senses.”

Good morrow, Tom-a-Bedlam !

Gabriel. Impudent fop, liar, and thief unhung !

[*Draws his rapier. ALDRED intercepts his attack on the KING, and in a few passes GABRIEL'S rapier is twisted out of his hand.*

Unsleep and starved, I was a fool to fight !
Yet look you, sirs, I am not as the world is ;
All of me speaks aloud the thing I feel ;
But mad ? To call me bluntly Tom-a-Bedlam
Upon some hasty phrases—truly said,
For if I would I know not how to lie—
Is most ungentle, mean and barbarous.

Charles. Good fellow, I see you are hardly in condition to answer for yourself ; but you interest me, and we must know more of you. Now I think of it I shall make you acquainted with the King, who comes to-day to Richmond. That may be your opportunity. [*To ALDRED.*]
You took his weapon : give him your purse—from me.

[*ALDRED hands GABRIEL his purse.*

Gabriel. You help one who needs help if ever man did !
I am other than I seem. I shall return this gracious purse, and invite your blade again, when my own may chance to be more at your service and less at your command. To whom am I indebted ?

Charles. That you shall know when you make yourself known. Get into some less irrational garb, and be at the palace by noon. There shall I bring you to speech with the King. I have not known such an appetite since I lodged at Boscobel.

[*Goes out followed by* BEAUMONT, HAMILTON, ALDRED, *and the others.* GABRIEL *picks up his rapier, and as he is going out stops suddenly, looking into the wood.*

Gabriel. I am mad indeed, or dreaming. Agnes Grey? She moves as though the solid earth were air,
And she a heavenly messenger; her eyes
With golden glances gild the dusky elms,
And inwardly she smiles because her heart
Beats music. Now, she tarries. Ah, she dips
Her face in dew. It is the first of May!
This chance is fate: the herald of my life
Sounds morning and a dynasty of joy.
How shall I speak to her? What shall I say? . . .
If she is not for me; if Anthony——

[*Goes out as* AGNES *enters, and* GRACE *is heard calling.*

Grace. Agnes! Agnes Grey!

Enter GRACE MYRTLE.

Agnes. Well, sweetheart; and so you have kept tryst after all. I have been looking for you. I feared you would fail me, I promise you.

Grace. I washed my face in the dew of the dawn in the ivy at my window ; for I was afraid to come after all. But at last I slipped out ; and there wasn't a mouse stirring.

Agnes. Except you, little mouse.

Grace. Agnes, I want to ask you something.

Agnes. What is it ?

Grace. You must promise not to laugh ! All my happiness in this world and the next is at stake, Agnes.

Agnes. I shall not laugh.

Grace. And you must give me your advice as solemnly as if you were on your death-bed, just as I will give you advice, if you want it, when I have a little more knowledge of men and understanding of affairs.

Agnes. Well, sweetheart.

Grace. Should I, ought I . . . am I old enough to be married ?

Agnes. I think so.

Grace. Truly, now ? Swear ! swear, Agnes !

Agnes. I swear that Grace Myrtle is old enough to be married, and sweet enough to be the wife of the handsomest and most charming prince in all fairyland.

Grace. Or in Richmond, Agnes ?

Agnes. Or in Richmond.

Grace. Very well, then ! Clement ! Clement !

Enter CLEMENT DORMER.

Agnes. Are you really married, Grace ?

Grace. Oh, I only wish we were !

Agnes. This is the prince, then.

Grace. If you laugh at us I shall go away and never speak to you again.

Agnes. I am not laughing at you. Good morning, Master Clement. [*To GRACE.*] Why did you never tell me you had a lover ?

Grace. I didn't like. It was much easier to bring him than to talk about him. But I was very miserable, hiding it from you. [*Whispers.*] Quick ! is he nice ?

Agnes. I like him.

Grace. Clement, she likes you.

Clement. [*Whispers.*] She is laughing at us in her sleeve, Grace.

Grace. I thought so ! I thought so ! Agnes, he says you are laughing at us.

Agnes. I am not laughing at you. How do you come to be so gaily dressed ? What will your father say ?

Grace. Clement ! Oh, I'm horribly afraid ! Clement gave it to me. It was easy enough to smuggle it into the house—in a parcel—outside me ; but how I am to be smuggled back into the house inside it ! Oh, but we won't think of it ! Do you know I never saw a maypole—never at all.

Clement. Ah ! I remember a maypole in Kent when I was a boy. It was like a barber's pole. Do you think it will last ?

Agnes. Will what last, Master Clement ?

Clement. This new happiness.

Agnes. Yes, if it be happiness.

Grace. Oh, Agnes! All a year now, ever since the King came back, people have said and sung what they pleased, and laughed and danced when and where they liked. Oh, if my father weren't a Roundhead! But when I marry Clement! [*Jumps into the trench.*] How deep it is! It must be a splendid maypole!

Clement. [*Helping GRACE out of the trench.*] They say the Roundheads are going to rise again and put down the maypoles.

Grace. Yes; and I heard that they are going to begin at Richmond. I wonder if my father has anything to do with it.

Agnes. Who put this nonsense into your foolish pates? Master Clement, is Grace to be Queen of the May?

Grace. Not I, indeed!

Agnes. Who then?

Grace. Nobody knows.

Clement. But we—we shall vote for you.

Agnes. Pooh! Simpletons! [*The sound of a horn is heard.*]

Clement. They are starting with the maypole now! They bring it through the town. Oh, I should like to meet them! Shall I?

Grace. Fly, dear, fly! [*CLEMENT runs out. The horn is heard again.*] He has taken the wrong way! I shall meet them first. [*Runs out.*]

Agnes. To think that these happy creatures will one day be old !

[*Re-enter GABRIEL, unseen by AGNES.*]

Why is my life so empty ? Every morn
Hope wakens me, but nothing still betides.
Surely some gladness, some transporting joy
Will snatch me up before my flower of life
Has withered with its fragrance all unproved !

Gabriel. Agnes ! Agnes Grey !

Agnes. Who are you ?

Gabriel. Agnes !

But is it Agnes Grey ? Through the dim wood
I saw you glimmer on me from the past,
The very image of the wondering girl
The wondering boy first kissed. But now you seem—
Ah ! what you are—that very wondering girl
Become a woman beautiful and wise
Sweetly requiring adoration.

Agnes. No ! . . .

And you are Gabriel Ashe. You were not drowned,
And Anthony's mistaken.

Gabriel. Anthony !

Agnes. Yes, he believed the news ; but I refused
To think all hands were lost, you being one.

[*Twitching his ragged sleeve.*]

I see how it has gone with you. No, now ;
I did not mean to hurt you. As you were

You are ; for still your eager reckless heart
Thrills on your tongue ; your whole soul speaks at once
In every look and deed. Ah, Gabriel!

Gabriel. I need no pity.

Agnes. No?—What have you done
Since Worcester fight? Remember how you came,
You and my father, hungry, worn and hurt—
You bore the banner in my father's troop
And had it round your body like a sash,
Sodden and limp with blood : to Warwick 'twas
You came, where I was living with my nurse—
Old Deborah, the sweetest Puritan
That ever starched her face, and well or ill
The only mother whom I knew. Dear Soul!
She died in France a month before my father.

Gabriel. Your father?

Agnes. Dead, Gabriel, a year ago.—
But after Worcester.

Gabriel. Oh, you bound our wounds,
And hid us in a loft till Cromwell's men
Gave o'er the search.

Agnes. You needed pity then.

Gabriel. And that same pity ripened into love.

Agnes. Such love as girls of sixteen think they feel.

Gabriel. Ten years ago——

Agnes. Well, we must meet again.
And talk of those old times ; to-morrow, say.

Gabriel. This is all wrong ; it must not be this way :

I love you, Agnes, and I need your love.

Agnes. But what if I be wed?

Gabriel.

You are not wed.

Agnes. But I may be betrothed.

Gabriel.

You are—to me.

Agnes. Ungenerous, to urge the childish past
After ten lonely, long, sad, wasted years!

Gabriel. After ten years of undivided love,
Wherein your image, married to my soul,
Endeared to me long travail and despair,
And made mere life desirable in times
Of harshest fortune, malice waked a storm
That shook the full-eared harvest of my joy
And home-returning pride. Hither at once
I came——

Agnes. 'Twas you who sought me yesterday!—
A beggar, so they said, importunate
And dangerous. And you withheld your name.

Gabriel. My name's a criminal; and I was bent
On meeting you unwarned—as I have done.
They told me you were wearied, having been
To Sutton-Highcroft—news that withered me
With terror lest the lie should prove no lie:
For he that was my friend of friends, even he
Had changed into a devil; and my old love,
Betrothed to him, he said, had ridden alone
To visit him. It hacked and tore my heart!
Though now I come resolved to know the truth,

I fled it wildly then : how I outlived
The night, or where it passed, I cannot think ;
I am hunted, too—because I am myself :
But that 's indifferent. If my love be false,
Beauty and truth are only dazzling baits
By evil set to catch the souls of men,
And life, the shameful mask of foul decay,
A cheat for honest hearts to fling away !

Agnes. I understand no word of this at all !

Gabriel. Say you are only mine ; and have no lover—
Excepting Gabriel Ashe.

Agnes. I am my own ;
And lover I acknowledge none. Good-bye.

Gabriel. You shall not go. [*Seizes her arm and holds
her.*] I need you—need you now.

Now is the crisis of your life and mine.
Think of it ; as by magic o'er a gulf
Of years we meet, and, looking doubtfully
Down the unfathomed past, ere we can breathe,
We find the opposing precipices knit,
And you and I, who hung shrouded in mist
On either rugged cliff, alone and sad,
Suddenly stand together in the light,
The green and stable earth beneath our feet,
Morning about us, and the song of birds ;
Summer begun, and fate on every hand
Urging by most decipherable signs
The union of our hearts sundered so long.

Agnes. Strong words and eloquent! But tell me,
friend :

What should unite us? People say that gold
Is the best solder for a pair of hearts.

Gabriel. Gold!—gold and power, the salt and spice of
life ;

Ease and renown, most savoury condiments ;
And love, life's wine.

Agnes. But you are poor, and I
Have scarce enough for one to starve upon.
We are not children ; let this folly end.

Gabriel. This folly is philosophy to me.
You say we both are poor ; love unalloyed
With wealth, may haughtily confederate
Two gallant hearts in brilliant poverty.

Agnes. Love, unalloyed with wealth, confederates
hearts
As once I saw a fire at night combine
Two cots in brilliant ruin ; morning showed
Ashes and smouldering stench. [*Twitching his rags.*] Ah !
Pah !

Gabriel. It is my raiment that offends you so.

Agnes. Indeed, your raiment kills the thought of love.
Love keeps a scanty wardrobe I have heard—
Blushes, they say, and little else ; but rags !
Cupid as scarecrow ! No !

Gabriel. You shall not go !
My dress is like the decade ending now,

Only my outward part. You must be mine ;
And as I straight shall cast these rags away
For silk and lace, so shall I doff my date
Of misery, and re-invest the years
With you—your beauty and delightfulness,
That have been still the core of all my life.

Agnes. Gabriel ! Gabriel ! In silk and lace
Perhaps your passion might commend itself
More courteously. I am curious to see
How finery becomes it ; in these rags
It smokes and sputters like a fire of weeds,
But in a clear flame, Gabriel, who can tell ?

[At intervals during the above the sound of pipe and tabor, and the note of a horn have been heard. Now the music is close at hand, and the Mayers enter. Two Pipers, a Horn-player, and a Taborer precede the Maypole, which, carried on the shoulders of three lads, is set up at once. GRACE and CLEMENT join AGNES GREY. GABRIEL looks on, leaning against a tree. A ring has been formed round the Maypole, when MYRTLE and a posse of Roundheads enter quickly. Upon their entrance the music ceases. GRACE hides behind CLEMENT.]

Myrtle. Where is my daughter ? *[To CLEMENT.]* Ha !
affronter of age, seducer of youth, where is my daughter ?
[GRACE sobs, covering her face with her hands, and her

father seizes her.] Where got you this cursed bedizenment? Quake, quake, girl! Are you not afraid that the earth shall open and swallow you up?

[Snatches her hood off and throws it on the ground.

Grace. I wish it would! I wish it would!

Myrtle. *[To CLEMENT.]* And as for you, debauched reveller, you shall answer this to the civil power! You shall answer it, sir! But my own poor affair must wait. True hearts, down with that pagan idol!

[The Roundheads attack the Maypole. GABRIEL drawing his rapier gets in front of the Maypole, and with his back to it beats down the staves of the Roundheads. CLEMENT wrenches a staff from one of the Roundheads, and with his back to GABRIEL defends the Maypole on his side.

Re-enter BEAUMONT, HAMILTON, ALDRED running. They take part against the Roundheads. Then the KING re-enters with the other Courtiers. The KING, having thrown off his cloak, his ribbon and star are visible.

Many Voices. The King! The King!

[The fighting ceases. GABRIEL, recognizing in the KING his recent interlocutor, kneels and offers his rapier. The Mayers all kneel. The Roundheads uncover, but do not kneel. CLEMENT kneels beside GRACE, and gets his

*arm about her waist. AGNES is surrounded
by a number of Courtiers, old acquaintances.*

Charles. Arise, Sir Knight of the Maypole. We saw your gallant defence ; it more than atones for your error in drawing upon us.

[GABRIEL rises, and is about to approach AGNES, but she looks away. He leans disconsolately against a tree.

Myrtle. Truly, Charles Stuart, this is an opportunity, a providence I looked not for ; but, doubtless, I shall be mightily borne through.

Roundheads. *[With approbation.]* Hum !

Myrtle. I have that to say——

Beaumont. Which were better left unsaid.

Roundheads. *[With disapprobation.]* Um !

Charles. Nay, I will hear him : I would willingly know more of my good Puritans.

Roundheads. Hum !

Charles. What is your name and calling ?

Myrtle. Isaiah Myrtle, a poor grazier, whom the Lord has prospered.

Charles. I doubt not the prosperity, Isaiah. Whom have you by the hand there ? She is scarcely arrayed like one of the godly.

Myrtle. Alas, it is my daughter.

Charles. How, Isaiah ? No man need be ashamed of such a daughter.

Myrtle. She has been led astray by a brawler of the

town—one Clement Dormer, a widow's son, who mispends his time and his mother's wealth.

Charles. Which is Clement?

Grace. This—this, your Majesty.

Charles. Clement, what have you to say for yourself? What, tongue-tied? Nay, Clement, be not ashamed. I do not altogether credit the accusation against you. Be all assembled on the Green again at noon. Let Master Myrtle bring his daughter; and, Master Clement, see that your mother accompanies you. This matter should not be difficult to arrange. Where is the Knight of the Maypole? One king may make another, and, therefore, in honour of your gallantry you shall be to-day our May Lord endowed with the privilege of choosing your queen. Look about.

Gabriel. [*Pointing to AGNES.*] Here I choose. She was chosen long ago.

Charles. What lady is that?

Hamilton. It is Mistress Agnes Grey, your Majesty.

Charles. Our hostess, whom we have invaded with such scant courtesy! [*To GABRIEL.*] How dare you choose one so much above you?

Agnes. I pray your Majesty to let it be as it is. There is some fate in this.

Charles. Say you so, Madam? What? You know each other! Who is he then?

Gabriel. I do not wish my name known, Agnes. I have sufficient and righteous reasons.

Charles. This is better and better ; and the right matter and mystery for a May morning. [*Gives AGNES his hand and leads her to the gateway.*] Strike up your music there, and let us see the Roundheads dance.

ACT III

SCENE.—*A part of Richmond Green adjoining the scene of the second act. Blackthorn trees in blossom, spear-oaks and hornbeams fill up the background, which rises like an amphitheatre. A low knoll on the left, where are the garlanded seats of the King and Queen of the May.*

The merrymaking is understood to be proceeding and in view, off the stage on the right.

It is early afternoon when the act begins.

When the Curtain rises, some Morris-dancers and Mayers dance across the stage. Immediately after them enter MESSENT and MOWLEM.

Messent.

AND I the best morris-dancer in three counties !
Mowlem. Grumbling again !

Messent. Their fore-gallant is a shambler and a moocher. I could dance better with a pair of crutches and half a leg. *[Dances.*

Trip and go, heave and ho,
Up and down, to and fro.

Mowlem. Once come up with the shipwrecked vaga-

bond, and we can make terms that will make our lives a perpetual maying; for if he's not the real Master Gabriel, I'll swallow my truncheon. Who's this a-coming our way?

Messent. Why, it's their King of May. We shall accost him regarding our affair.

Enter GABRIEL, handsomely dressed, his style as King of the May being indicated by a scarf and gilded staff. He is looking behind him on his entrance, and is at a loss for a moment, when he comes unexpectedly on the Constables.

Gabriel. What are you doing here? Get to your gambols again.

Mowlem. If it please your kingly worship, we are drawn aside to ruminate on our proceeding.

Messent. Ruminatè? What's that? Leave words to me, neighbour, and content yourself with intelligible language. To ruminate is to be one that is a solitary drinker, and you know I am never that. I am always drunk in company. You should have said fulminate, neighbour. Remember: fulminate, to think aloud, or to speak in one's sleep, or to swear without ceasing. It has many meanings.

Gabriel. Fulminate your business with me, then, and be shot of it, like a right marksman.

Messent. We are no fire-eaters, sir. We are well-

known constables ; and I, moreover, am the senile third-borough.

Gabriel. What does your senility require of me ?

Messent. We are in pursuit of an attempted murderer——

Gabriel. Attempted !

Messent. A sort of lunatic, a mad lunatic, that banged Squire Ashe and knocked him senseless. But Squire got on 's legs again in a gliff, and we would fain know if your worship has seen the jackanapes.

Gabriel. I have seen him.

Mowlem. Then are we made men.

Gabriel. I am glad of it. [Going.

Messent. But your worship has not told us where he is.

Gabriel. You will follow my instructions absolutely ?

Messent. We will, sir.

Gabriel. Where was he last in hiding ?

Messent. At Farmer Jephson's, sir.

Gabriel. Search for him, then, in Farmer Jephson's barn.

Messent. We have been there twice already.

Mowlem. And so had he, neighbour.

Gabriel. The third time is always lucky.

Messent. Upon your worship's worth, and your honour's honour, tell us, for we are sick and sorry men, if the vagabond be in or be not in Farmer Jephson's barn.

Gabriel. If you find him not in Farmer Jephson's barn, come back and arrest me in his stead.

Messent. Heaven reward your honour! We have him now, neighbour, and squire's nose is out of joint.

[*MESSENT and MOWLEM go out.*]

Enter AGNES, wearing a garland as Queen of the May.

Agnes. At your desire, my consort of the May,
I come to know your will. Or short or sweet
Or hasty and harsh, be swift; for those I left
Will follow soon.

Gabriel. I am jealous of the King :
Not for myself, but for your honour, Agnes.

Agnes. My honour—is too sacred to be named.

Gabriel. If you continue dancing with the King
It will be named, misnamed, un-named and shamed
Into dishonour, perfect though it be.
To bend your head and hearken breathlessly ;
To let your eyelids droop beneath his glance ;
To step aside and rest while at your feet
The royal lover sighs ! You must conceive
The inevitable end of this.

Agnes. Indeed !

Gabriel. Never in deed : but in the envious thought
Of those who watch.

Agnes. I care not what they think !

Gabriel. Or what they say ? The honour of us all
Revives or fades upon the tongues of men :
Not reputation only suffers death

By calumny ; infesting lies like moths
In damask, mildew on the fields, can gnaw
The richest nature threadbare, and transform
A liberal spirit to the actual shame
Imputed by the slander. This is seen
In generous women chiefly ; and in you
The taint appears already, for your name
Is coupled with the King's by courtier
And countryman.

Agnes. But this is old wives' wisdom.
My ears reject it, though I hear. And you ?
Who granted you authority to task
My conduct ? You who dare not tell your name !
A shivering beggar at the break of day,
In hungry rags ; at noon, a gay gallant,
The favourite of a monarch—that very King
Whose complaisance you say calumniates me !

Gabriel. Beggar or gay gallant, grasp what I say
As if I were your conscience. Charles is here
For the sole purpose of betraying you :
The thing is known and talked of nakedly,
And some declare you are his lover now.

Agnes. Why are men's minds so loathsome ! It is false.
The King converses honourably ; plays,
Like his grandsires, Henry of France and James
Of Scotland, for his people's hearts, with mirth
And comradeship ; and since I am a queen,
He does to me to-day especial grace,

Ephemeral as my royalty though it be.

Gabriel. Ephemeral as your Mayday royalty
Your fame is, if you set my warning by!
I love the King! I fought, I bled for him!
But I conjure you, go!—hide in your grave.
Rather than meet again this tarnisher
Of women, whose unwholesome glance itself
Can, in the world's regard, sully the purest.

Agnes. I will not heed the lying tongues of men,
But show my trust in this most gracious King.

Gabriel. He comes! You stay?—You know not what
you do!

Agnes. I know that I should hate to bear a mind
So mean as yours.

Gabriel. I cannot brook the sight
Of innocence debased and beauty stained!
Oh, the mere whisper of a libertine
Abates the worship of the fairest soul!

[*Goes out.*

CHARLES, ALDRED, BEAUMONT, HAMILTON, and
Courtiers enter. AGNES keeps aloof.

Charles. Umph! This fantastical animal presumes
upon his twelve hours' sovereignty to incommode my
pleasure. I find him irksome now.

Aldred. It is near dinner-time. Withdraw to the palace
with Mistress Grey and leave him to digest his melan-
choly.

Charles. A proper punishment, Aldred.

Beaumont. And the family question your Majesty agreed to consider ?

Charles. Ah ! the grazier and his amorous daughter. I had forgotten them. Yes ; let us despatch that matter. Collect the parties and bid the nameless fellow of the May attend.

[BEAUMONT, ALDRED, HAMILTON, and the Courtiers go out. CHARLES and AGNES walk across the Green.

Charles. Mistress Grey, your quick wit can tell me, I am sure, how to deal with the Puritan's pretty daughter.

Agnes. With Grace Myrtle ? Oh, I would have your Majesty protect her heart from her father's religion.

Charles. Is it not rather a kind of irreligion that wars with an innocent love ?

Agnes. An innocent love, your Majesty ? All love is innocent.

Charles. That is a perilous doctrine.

Agnes. For perilous natures ; but not for those that are sure of themselves.

Charles. Are there any that are sure of themselves ?

Agnes. I am always sure of myself.

Charles. A proud saying. So queens should speak.

[*They go out talking.*

Enter EUSEBY.

Euseby. Here, worshipful sir ! This way !

Enter ANTHONY, very pale and walking lame.

Anthony. Where have you brought me ?

Euseby. This is the presence room of the King and Queen of the May, and I inquired of one now who told me they will all come hither shortly for the settling of the matter of Grace Myrtle's hood and skirt.

[Rubs his hands gleefully.]

Anthony. Are your hands cold, Euseby ?

Euseby. No, worshipful sir : it is an unfortunate habit of mine, and habit is second nature.

Anthony. Habit, Euseby, is not second nature. How often must I rebuke your abuse of saws and maxims ? Will you compel me to reiterate hourly that the proverb is the subtlest form of that figure of speech, commonly called a lie ? Take now a special favourite of gossips, chaplains, old maids, half-pay officers, and idle busybodies all the world over—"A man is known by the company he keeps." For example, you, Euseby Trenchard, spend the bulk of your time with me !

Euseby. *[To himself.]* But not as your companion, and so, not in your company. That puts him down again.

Anthony. With me, Master Euseby ! And yet you have neither dignity nor eloquence, manners, ease, nor self-respect. Proverbs are false coin : when the wisdom of many becomes the wit of one, it ceases to be either wit or wisdom.

Euseby. [*To himself.*] Shall I ever be avenged for all these snubs? If now the King be the monarch of parts——

Anthony. What are you muttering at?

Euseby. Worshipful sir, it will break forth at last! I say to myself: if the King be the monarch of parts they give him out, and I get speech of him, he may appreciate my wit; while with you, worshipful sir, I must hide it away in my bosom, where it gnaws me like the Spartan's fox. The King may say to me—why may the King not speak to me after dinner? The King: "Let us have a long talk, Master Trenchard! I have noted you, and you seem to me a man of much likelihood." Me: "Were I of no likelihood at all, to seem to be so in your Majesty's eyes would create immediately a spirit of likelihood within me." The King: "Why, the fellow is a born courtier!" Me again: "Good blood cannot lie, your Majesty. My great grandfather lived and died at the Court of Queen Elizabeth."—It is as I say, your worship. He was groom to a gentleman-in-waiting, and died of a quinsy at Greenwich.—The King: "Do you tell me so, Master Trenchard! And what can I do for you, Master Trenchard? Is there ever an office or a sinecure, now—eh?" Me once more: "If in anything I can please your Majesty by accepting some small post of receipt or so, your Majesty has but to name it."

Re-enter CHARLES with AGNES.

Charles. Have we stumbled upon a rehearsal, or some new conspiracy?

Anthony. Your Majesty, this is an honest serving-man of mine who believes himself competent to astonish royalty with his mother-wit.

Charles. Say you so? We shall rejoice to be astonished, honest serving-man.

Anthony. Now, Euseby; the King invites you to display your quality.

Euseby. But it is so sudden, your Majesty! I have indeed a great gift of afterthought which I could easily display without a moment's hesitation if I had time to bethink myself a little.

Charles. Well, well, Master Afterthought, I doubt not you will yet make a good remark.—I am glad to see you, Master Ashe. Our pleasure had lacked something had you failed to visit us.

Anthony. Your Majesty honours me far beyond my poor deserts; but for an odd fall that disabled me, I had paid my duty sooner.

Charles. Indeed, you look pale, and carry a limb uneasily. Master Ashe, I shall remember your painstaking courtesy. Mistress Grey has sounded your praises, I can tell you. You must not stand. A seat for Master Ashe. [*EUSEBY goes out.*] We have a merry trial on hand, and you shall be of the court.

Enter the Mayers ; among them MISTRESS DORMER, JUDITH RUMBOLD, and CLEMENT ; ISAIAH MYRTLE and GRACE ; JANE GOSLING, JEREMY STRUTT, and HUMPHREY. CHARLES and AGNES take the garlanded seats and EUSEBY brings a chair for ANTHONY. BEAUMONT, HAMILTON, ALDRED and the Courtiers enter and stand about the KING's chair.

Charles. Where are the parties in the case ?

Beaumont. Clement and Grace ; Isaiah and Mistress Dormer.

[The four step from the crowd and make obeisance in their individual fashion. ISAIAH carries the blue skirt and hood and flings them down before the KING.]

Charles. Ah ! the *corpus delicti*. Will you abide by our decision, Isaiah ?

Isaiah. If it stand with my interest and there be no iniquity in it.

Charles. Faith, you butter your conscience on both sides, Isaiah. Mistress Dormer ?

Re-enter GABRIEL. He stands apart, watching AGNES.

Mistress Dormer. I will abide by your gracious Majesty's decision, for it behoves me so to do. But if there should be any question of branding or whipping, your Majesty, here is Judith Rumbold—Judith !

[Pulls JUDITH forward and presents her to the KING.]

Charles. What wise virgin is she?

Mistress Dormer. One, your Majesty, that out of love for my boy, Clement, will take his punishment upon her.

Beaumont. In good truly, Mistress Rumbold has ample room for punishment.

Judith. By proxy! By proxy!

Mistress Dormer. Judith, your Majesty, the proxy for Clement—

Judith. [*Pulling forward HUMPHREY.*] And my manservant, Humphrey, the proxy for me.

Mistress Dormer. It is very well known that princes have whipping-boys——

Judith. And I, being, so please your Majesty——

Mistress Dormer. An able-bodied woman, Judith!

Judith. And desirous of Clement's well-being——

Mistress Dormer. We have thought that if Judith were to be Clement's whipping-boy and suffer in her own person——

Judith. In Humphrey's person, aunt!

Mistress Dormer. Now I have it. If Judith were to suffer in Humphrey's person Clement's whipping it came into our heads that Grace Myrtle might carry her eggs to another market.

Aldred. What yesty minds these idle women have!

Charles. And what have you to say, Humphrey?

Humphrey. A shilling a blow.

Charles. Odd's fish, man! Is that the market price?

Humphrey. I be stout-hearted yokel. A hundred blows is a hundred shillings. With the blows on my back and the money in my hand, I go my ways to Jane Gosling.

Charles. Ha !

Humphrey. Jane gave me her promise an' I could save five pounds.

Charles. And so whipping is your substitute for thrift. Is Jane here ?

[*HUMPHREY beckons JANE, who comes forward.*]

Charles. Well, Jane.

Jane. Well, sir.

Charles. Do you know what collusion is, Jane ?

Jane. Not if it be naughty ; but if it be honest I know un well enough.

Charles. This is an odd bargain you have made with Humphrey.

Jane. Nay, I never make no bargains. All I want is five pounds, and little enough to marry on.

Charles. Little enough, indeed ! But such matters are beyond me ; and my decision is to refer them to his majesty of the May, whose subject I am. Have you apprised him ?

Beaumont. He is here, your Majesty.

Charles. Your highness understands the circumstances and condition of these appellants ?

Gabriel. [*Startled for a moment on seeing ANTHONY.*] As well as observation and sympathy can instruct an open mind.

Charles. What is it, Master Ashe?

Anthony. I crave your Majesty's pardon. A shaft of pain. It has passed.

Charles. [*To GABRIEL.*] Declare, then, whether Clement's crime be a crime or no; what penalty, if any; and who shall marry who.

Gabriel. Before I judge these lovers, a word with you, Peasants and gentlefolk, for some have sneered.

Love that makes wisdom wiser, and heroes gods,

Confirms simplicity in simple minds,

And in his folly, cloisters up the fool.

Yet is it love; for Clement when he robbed

His mother's pipkin, Humphrey resolved to be

Vicar for Clement's sin, received no wound

In honour or in conscience; or if they did

It is no mortal wound; and what appears

Ridiculous and mean deserves contempt

No more than loftiest acts, if both be sprung

From the deep root of love. Though love and laughter

Are close akin, derision fights with both;

Therefore to-day let mockery be dumb

Beneath the May-queen's smile. [*To HUMPHREY.*] For

you, stout heart,

I honour you. The mate you would have bought

With stripes and blood you shall possess unscourged:

The hundred shillings shall be yours. What says

My brother of England?

Charles. Very wisely judged.

Humphrey. What did I tell 'ee, Jane? 'Tis better to be born lucky than rich.

Jane. "What kind o' day will't be, neighbour?"
"Ask me at night." We'm only beginning, Humphrey.

Gabriel. Judith.

Mistress Dormer. Clement! This is the sweetest man, Judith. Now, sir.

Gabriel. How old are you, Judith?

Mistress Dormer. Judith is a very good age. Always let a young man marry a stout handsome woman some ten or fifteen years older than himself.

Gabriel. How will that help him?

Mistress Dormer. She can be in place of a mother to him or an aunt, as well as a wife, and check him and manage him; and that is what young husbands need.

Gabriel. Clement, will you have this woman to wife?

Clement. Cousin Judy, why do you let my mother bother us like this?

Judith. Truly, cousin, I love you.

Clement. I cannot love you, cousin.

Judith. Oh, aunt!—But a wink's as good as a nod to a blind horse, cousin; I would never marry a man against his will. You remember when I said that, aunt?

Mistress Dormer. You said it, Judith; you did. I remember.

Judith. Marry a man against his will? Never!
Judith Rumbold is no shrew, and no wanton neither.

Mistress Dormer. It was in her own three-acre park in

the evening; by the same token a yellow cow she had kicked over the pail and upset her milking-maid, Annot Golightly, who was caught in the stable on Shrove Tuesday with cold pancakes and sweet ale for Tom Patchin, that's now the squire's man.

Judith. No; Judith Rumbold has a mind of her own; it was noticed in me from a child. Come, aunt.

Mistress Dormer. Tut, tut, Judith! You wait till he judges us.

Gabriel. About this theft. You took your mother's money?

Mistress Dormer. That he did, sir; which he never would have done had he married Judith.

Isaiah. Since this is certain, I am not free to imperil my flesh and blood further. I withdraw from the covenant. Youth and a hot head must be endured; age will mend them: but a young thief makes an old rogue, and such is not for my daughter. Come home with me, Grace.

Agnes. Grace, come to me. Grace cannot leave her duty; she is the May-queen's bower-maiden.

Isaiah. What! Shall parental authority have no sway?

Gabriel. While I am King it shall have no sway over that which it cannot control, the hearts of lovers. Now, Clement, what have you to say? Speak frankly. The judge should always be the culprit's best friend, and such I am to you.

[CLEMENT *is tongue-tied; hangs his head and sobs, hiding his face.*

Mistress Dormer. [*Tearfully.*] Oh, sirs, he never stole it! He is welcome to my last penny! All that I have is his!

Gabriel. You withdraw the charge, then?

Mistress Dormer. I withdraw it! I withdraw it!

Clement. But I did steal.

Grace. [*Sobbing.*] It was my fault! I had never worn silk in my life, and I tempted him.

Judith. She tempted him! She tempted him!

Mistress Dormer. She confesses it! She confesses it!

Gabriel. Without more ado, I pronounce Clement's theft no theft. England?

Charles. I cordially concur with his Majesty of the May.

Mistress Dormer. The King concurs! He concurs with his Majesty!

Gabriel. Now, Isaiah, why may your daughter not marry Clement?

Isaiah. Though it would be the reverse of supererogatory, yet I plainly perceive it would be unavailing to open up doctrinal matters in these presences. Wherefore I confine myself to this: Grace is a foolish girl, ignorant and immature: to let her choose for herself at her years were to warp her character for life, even if her choice had fallen on a suitable mate.

Mistress Dormer. This is the wisest man in Richmond! Oh, Master Myrtle, why will you be a Roundhead?

Gabriel. And Mistress Dormer, why may Clement not marry Grace?

Mistress Dormer. Because I wish him to marry Judith, sir.

Gabriel. He shall not marry Judith. That is decided.

Charles. A wise decision.

Mistress Dormer. But Grace Myrtle—a little pretty wanton that has stolen a boy's heart from his mother! And he is no older than she! And it is calf-love, I tell you, sirs! It is that beastly calf-love which all the world derides!

Gabriel. Which all the world derides—but not to-day.
No love at all can hold a lamp to this
That rises with the burning dawn of sense,
A new star over Eden, and reveals
The tree of knowledge fruitful in the midst
Beside the ever-flowering tree of life;
That changes doubt and fear of untried youth
To courage and belief; and is itself
Its sanction, and the only love indeed
That marriage can adorn. Clement and Grace
Nature and I bestow you on each other.
Such is the sentence of the King of May.

Charles. Again a wise decision. Isaiah?

Isaiah. I submit to your Majesty; but let them wait a year or two.

Mistress Dormer. Let them wait! Let them wait! I'll be bound they'll change their minds.

Charles. And that is just. Give them time to change their minds.

Gabriel. Brother of England, they must not change
their minds ;

For if they change their minds, soon will they learn
To doubt their hearts and falsely find out love
The mere illusion worldly wisdom mocks.
For thus are cynics and seducers made—
Men whom the world betrays with easy scorn
Of budding passion, and who betray themselves
Thereafter all their lives. Let Clement wed
His first love now ; so both shall never know
Distrust of their own hearts, but live and die
The fairest vision to be seen on earth,
A man and woman venerating life,
And sacred to each other to the end !

Isaiah. But he is only a boy ; his education not half done ; no experience of the world ; not fully grown either. What kind of husband will he make ?

Mistress Dormer. And that's just what I say!

Clement. I must be married, mother! A boy?—I know :
A school-boy. But how splendid it will be
Just for a school-boy to be married!

Charles. Sò!

Your tongue is loosed at last, my master !

Grace. Yes!

And if I be not married now, I feel
My heart will break.

Isaiah. This is mere wantonness.

Clement. It's not just to be married that we want

But to be married to each other now
That love is new and great. Think for me, mother.
Think for your daughter, sir. If I could speak !

Gabriel. You have spoken well and as a brave boy
should.

Isaiah. Yes, but his education : he is known
A dunce and truant.

Clement. Oh, my education
Is all to come ! I wish to educate
Myself in my own way, and I have set
Marriage for the first lesson.

Gabriel. And the second ?

Clement. Oh, master, we shall have a boy, I hope !

Gabriel. Yes, that will be the second lesson.

Mistress Dormer. This beats all !

Isaiah. I confess the youth is of a soberer mind than I
thought.

[*The bystanders are much and variously moved.*

CHARLES speaks with AGNES, MISTRESS
DORMER with the help of JANE GOSLING
dresses GRACE in the hood and skirt, nodding
defiance to ISAIAH, who groans and shakes his
head. JUDITH RUMBOLD fans herself dis-
dainfully ; and ANTHONY rises and talks
apart with GABRIEL. .

Anthony. So ! I was sure of it : you are the rascal who
stole my uncle's will from my poor cousin Gabriel ; and
when I had recovered it, stole it again from me.

Gabriel. I have not the will. What care I for wills?

[*Leaves* ANTHONY.]

Beaumont. What new turn is this, Master Ashe?

Anthony. An entire round of fortune's wheel, Sir Harry.
I am going to lay your May-king by the heels.

[*Goes out.* JEREMY STRUTT stalks forward and
lays his hand on JUDITH'S shoulder.]

Jeremy. Judith!

Charles. What intervener have we here?

Mistress Dormer. Oh! this is Jeremy Strutt, your Majesty; my second cousin by the mother's side. A prudent mouse, your Majesty, has more than one hole; an ancient archer had two strings to his bow; and a marriageable woman must always have a do-no-better. Jeremy is Judith's last shift, and has been waiting . . . Tell the King how long you have been waiting on Judith, Jeremy.

Jeremy. Twenty years. I have loved Judith Rumbold since she was a girl of fifteen.

Hamilton. That makes Judith thirty-five.

Jeremy. And my love for her has increased with the years.

Hamilton. And with her girth?

Jeremy. Sir, Judith is a magnificent creature!

Charles. Very well said, Jeremy.

Mistress Dormer. Jeremy, though patient, is a man of spirit, your Majesty. And besides, a marriage with Jeremy will keep the money in the family. And after all, Judith, that is what our hearts are set on.

Judith. I have said it again and again. Let me marry Clement for choice, for I could be a second mother to him.

Mistress Dormer. [*Explaining blandly to the KING.*] If I were to die suddenly.

Judith. But if not Clement, then Jeremy—for the money must be kept in the family.

Enter EUSEBY, as Major-domo.

Euseby. [*To AGNES.*] Madam, his Majesty is served.

Charles. A very good remark, Master Afterthought. I knew your wit only required an apt occasion. But the last word must be our Queen's. What has she to say to these holiday couples?

Agnes. Send for the parson! Marriages in May
Are held unlucky, ancient writers say;
But if *two* monarchs bless the pairs, why then
The destinies must even sing Amen!

Charles. So let it be.

[*CHARLES gives AGNES his hand and they go out one way followed by the court party, while MISTRESS DORMER, CLEMENT, GRACE, and the town party go out another way. Re-enter ANTHONY, with four Morris-dancers who guard GABRIEL. ANTHONY then goes out after the KING, with whom he returns. BEAUMONT, ALDRED, etc., join them.*]

Charles. Master Ashe, this is a strange interruption, but the import of the matter will doubtless excuse you.

Anthony. Your Majesty, it is of public import. Briefly, no purse or throat is safe where this ruffler comes.

Charles. That is his secret then : it is worse than I expected. You know him ?

Anthony. I have seen him only once before, but I know him for an inventive malefactor of extraordinary audacity and resolution ; and this time I shall take care to hold him fast. When I sentenced him yesterday to be whipped as a vagabond and impostor, he overthrew the constables, attempted my life, and stole off with a weapon of rarity and price. Your Majesty knows with what resourceful wit he has entertained himself since. Yesterday he impersonated a relative of mine who is dead : to-day, I understand, he plays the mysterious stranger.

Charles. So, so, my sometime cousin ! But I shall say nothing to add to your discomfiture.

Gabriel. May I say nothing in my own defence
Against a charge as false as hate can forge ?

Charles. What can you say ?

Gabriel. That I am Gabriel Ashe
Of Sutton-Highcroft, cousin to this—dead soul.

Anthony. Your Majesty, he is like my cousin Gabriel, but —

Charles. Understood ; a personator must always rely on likeness.

Anthony. So great a likeness that at first I was in doubt ;

but this is not the man whom I loved more than a brother, and whose living hand I would give all I possess to clasp.

Charles. Have him away. [Turns to go.

Gabriel. King ! King ! You must not bid iniquity Achieve this heinous conquest.

Charles. Answer a plain question. Did you attack Master Anthony Ashe ?

Gabriel. Yes ; but he wronged me with malignity Unmatched and unimagined, save by him.

Charles. You say you are his cousin. Why did you conceal your identity from me ?

Gabriel. In rags, the very picture of a knave I met your Majesty, not knowing you. And I had found my name my enemy ; I knew I was pursued ; I could not tell——

Charles. Pho ! Could not tell ! This is a magpie tale.

Gabriel. But give me leave to speak ! It is my life, My honour I contend for !

Beaumont. Honour !

Gabriel. Yes ;

Is honour out of fashion ? Then I fear
I must have lived too long afar from towns
With day and night and winds and seas for mates,
And my own thoughts for study, since my speech
Is like an outland tongue to men of mode
Accomplished in the converse of the world.
I cease to cope with preconceived contempt ;

But there's a simple way to reach the truth :

Let Agnes Grey declare what man I am.

Charles. Mistress Grey shall be troubled with your insolence no further. You have the very accent and shifting phrase of a detected rogue.—Let the punishment you decreed be rigorously inflicted. For myself, being an amused and willing dupe, I could have forgiven his imposture ; but that a strolling fellow should assail the affections of an honourable lady is an unpardonable offence. [*ALDRED takes CHARLES aside.*]

Aldred. Your Majesty, this Anthony Ashe is known a double dealer. I can see he is ill at ease.

Charles. You fear injustice ?

Aldred. Mistress Grey——

Charles. She is not here ; nor would I have her name mixed in this nauseous business. I have other discourse for Mistress Grey. And, besides, dinner waits. Nevertheless—Odd's fish, that's a quaint notion !——True—'twould be a blemish on the day to end it with the fustigation of him who has been the life and soul of our merry-making. [*To GABRIEL.*] I shall offer you an alternative in the antique style, and in keeping with our fantastic holiday. [*To a Morris-dancer.*] Come hither, Morisco—you in the yellow and red. Off with your head-dress ! Leave your bauble ! [*Morris-dancer places his bauble beside his cap-and-bells and returns to his companions.*] Sir Knight of the Maypole, you have a pretty gift of speech ; you have shown an inclination to rebuke your sovereign,

and a desire to manage the affairs of the universe. With this staff of office, and in this belled habiliment, you shall have ample liberty to indulge your garrulity and censorious temper. The post has fallen into abeyance, but no court is furnished to the feather without a royal jester; our restoration lacked only the cap-and-bells.

Gabriel. Become a jester in a motley hood!

Charles. It is a fair offer to a nameless vagabond. If you refuse it, why then the law must take its way, and the beadle be your tailor: I warrant you he will induct you into a striped jacket that will not divest so easily as this.

Anthony. If he accepts your Majesty's offer, I understand we forego the present whipping; but not the penalty of his capital crimes.

Charles. It was my purpose, with your goodwill, to condone everything. However, if you insist upon the law——

Anthony. He is trebly a villain: impostor, robber, would-be murderer!

Charles. Why so rancorous, Master Ashe? But I sympathize with your hunger: you will be more forgiving after dinner. Now, by St. Paul, it would be a tight hood I could not get into to shun a scourging and a hanging afterwards! Better a cap-and-bells than a hempen scarf! Come, gentlemen; he is bashful at his toilet.

Anthony. But, your Majesty, he may perhaps escape.

Charles. His brethren of the bauble will take care of that, as you provided. [*To GABRIEL.*] You shall be welcome whenever you like, Monsieur Marotte.

[*CHARLES, ANTHONY, etc., go out.*]

Gabriel. My friend—my love—my King——

ACT IV

SCENE.—*The KING'S Apartments in Richmond Court : the Privy Chamber improvised as dining-room, with an ante-room as bedroom at the back. On one side an Elizabethan cupboard in carved oak ; on the other a Flemish buffet of the sixteenth century. To the left of the centre an old-fashioned dining-table, forming three sides of a cube. French and Dutch pictures on the walls.*

CHARLES, with AGNES, ALDRED and HAMILTON upon his right, and BEAUMONT, a Lady and ANTHONY on his left, is seated at the table, on which are wine and dessert. EUSEBY and a Servant are in attendance, but after offering wine, which is declined, they go out by a door on the right, opening into the King's Gallery.

It is towards evening and the company are about to withdraw.

Hamilton.

NO, Harry ; I maintain it : women have neither heart nor intellect, and comprehend them so little that they imagine they possess both.

Beaumont. Oh, but women have been known to fall in love, and witty sayings are on record.

[CHARLES rises ; then the others. *A general movement towards the right.*

Hamilton. Doubtless women have learnt to speak, like parrots, by living with men; and some of them can even imitate thought and passion; but they are not human.

Lady. Oh, fie, Sir Gilbert!

Charles. That is your way out.

Hamilton. My way out?

Charles. Women are not human. You must say that gallantly, and so unsay it, and make your peace.

Hamilton. Ah! When I said that women are not human, I meant—I could have no other meaning—that they are divine.

Agnes. Sir Gilbert, you must pluck the tail of this ribald crow with me. Women have neither heart nor intellect. That interests. You mean that women think and feel quite differently from men?

[AGNES and HAMILTON go out, followed by the others; but ANTHONY detains CHARLES.

Anthony. Your Majesty, dare I entreat a word?

Charles. Again, Master Ashe? It seems to me you are the importunate judge. Why do you waylay me a second time?

Anthony. I am deeply concerned for the future of Mistress Grey, your Majesty.

Charles. Um? Ah?

Anthony. She is now alone in the world, and is under your Majesty's protection.

Charles. You wish to marry her?

Anthony. With your Majesty's permission.

Charles. And Mistress Grey's inclination?

Anthony. We have known each other since we were children, and have always been on the best of terms.

Charles. Then why not ask the lady?

Anthony. She is ambitious, and looks higher than a simple squire.

Charles. I think so, too. I hold you in esteem, Master Ashe. It is needless to tell a man of taçt and enterprise that these attributes are rare. We must serve the State in the advancement of your fortunes. Meantime shall I speak with Mistress Grey?

Anthony. It was my hope, your Majesty.

Charles. Send her to me, and I will lay the matter before her. Master Ashe, I think of your future. If you marry Mistress Grey you join the Embassy at the Hague, and your wife can live at Whitehall.

Anthony. Your Majesty . . . my desire is for retirement; a public career has no fascination for me.

Charles. And as for your cousin——

Anthony. I have no cousin. Gabriel was drowned.

Charles. Well, I shall take your word for that.

Anthony. Does your Majesty doubt the fact?

Charles. Oh, the fact! Facts are amenable, and can be inclined this way and that. For my own part I carry no bias in favour of this *soi-disant* cousin. Like yourself he is in love with Mistress Grey; and, granting him eligible, would prove, I fear, a less tractable husband than you;

because if he is your cousin, he is clearly a much-abused man, and on that account in all likelihood, a very honest one. Bid Mistress Grey come to me. And, Master Ashe, find out if that infamous impostor has donned the cap-and-bells.

[ANTHONY goes out; CHARLES opens a door at the back and is about to enter his bedroom, when he notices EUSEBY, who is lighting the candles on the toilet-table. A further door is visible across the bed.

Charles. Ah, Master Afterthought! It appears you are a henchman of multifarious duties. Hey, Master Afterthought?

Euseby. [*Stammering.*] I am one, your Majesty—I am one that is——

Charles. One that takes precedence of one that isn't anywhere and at all times. Have you a key there?

Euseby. Yes, your Majesty.

Charles. Lock the door and bring the key to me. [EUSEBY locks the further door and brings the key to CHARLES.] Why come you not to court, Master Afterthought?

Euseby. I follow my master, sir.

Charles. Give me some wine. [EUSEBY fills a goblet which the KING drinks off.] Again. [EUSEBY re-fills and the KING sits on the table sipping the wine. Re-enter AGNES. EUSEBY goes out.] Agnes! Agnes, have you ever heard tell of a remarkable thing called duty?

Agnes. Yes, your Majesty. I have always thought it a very high thing.

Charles. And so it is. There is only one thing higher.
—You do not ask what?

Agnes. No, your Majesty.

Charles. But do you know what that thing is which is higher than duty?

Agnes. I have been taught that duty exalts the lowliest action and glorifies the most honourable, just as your Majesty's image gives currency to base metal and a new value to the precious ones.

Charles. What is the occasion of so becoming a gravity? No answer? . . . Be it known, then, I have a duty to perform; and although I fail to perceive that my Majesty gilds it with any extrinsic glory, it shall issue from the royal mint fine gold and full weight. Master Anthony Ashe solicits your hand in marriage: I commend him heartily as the ductile stuff out of which model husbands are coined.

Agnes. If it please your Majesty I should prefer not to marry Master Anthony Ashe.

Charles. It does please me! You shall choose your own husband, if you must have one; your own title and estate. And I undertake while the honest fellow polishes his wits abroad in business of the realm that his good wife's heart shall not grow rusty for lack of love at home. Pardon the levity of the words; though I bear it lightly, my mind is burdened. In all my life I have not loved a woman as I

love you. I have said the same to many : it was never true before.

Agnes. But a king has no right to love a subject in that way, or if he so far forget himself, his kingly honour enjoins silence.

Charles. There are rights and rites ; I honour none but those of love. The world is now only Agnes Grey. And that is great. I never thought to fathom the very depths of love ; indeed, I had no belief that love was any deeper than a wine-glass, how often soever it might be filled and drained. Now, like a boy, I say—give me this woman and then let doomsday come.

Agnes. The day I become your Majesty's, will be doomsday for me ; but that day is not now, nor shall it ever dawn.

Charles. Ah ! You will never be mercenary : you will never hold off to make terms ! Trust my love. You shall have more wealth than you would ever dream of asking, and all your heart desires.

Agnes. Is there no way to be understood ? When I give my love I shall give it freely to him who shall make me his wife.

Charles. You shall be as my wife—the sole lady of my heart. I would perpetuate this new-old mood you have aroused in me. For us there shall exist no interest but ourselves ; and you shall have the ruining of these hateful kingdoms of mine. How love, true love, goads us into enmity ! Commonly I dislike to see men ill at ease ; now

I rejoice even in the affliction of such a pair of pitiful rivals as Master Ashe and the babbling May-fellow. Which of the two is the greater simpleton! Oh, but we shall find means to use up in our pleasure whole nations of Englishmen; empty their pockets, distress their pride, and hurt their inmost souls—the stupid, loyal, greedy gang that Cromwell whipped, as well as the anxious dogged knaves that killed my father, left me a beggar in my best years, and made the crown the subject of its subjects. This that glides through my mind at odd times, you and my great love for you will anchor firmly there: it is the true vengeance of a Stuart on the dull folk who understand him not! [AGNES endeavours to go out.] What? No! And you only cheapen your beauty by such ordinary coyness. Yield nobly and you are Queen of me for life.

Agnes. I beseech—I command your Majesty, by every hallowed name that men regard, to let me go!

Charles. You are difficult to woo, Agnes! A reason—an all-sufficient reason why you must be won!

Agnes. [*Recollecting suddenly a way of escape.*] Your Majesty will remember that I am at home here. There is a way through the bedroom. [*Going out at the back.*] I hope you will soon regret what you have said, and that you will never cease to regret it. [*Enters the bedroom, closing the door after her.* CHARLES listens at the door. AGNES cries out when she discovers that the further door has been locked. Immediately after, voices in angry dispute are heard in the King's Gallery. CHARLES who has been about

to open the bedroom door locks it when the quarrelling is heard.]
Let me out !

Charles. Hush ! Some quarrel has broken forth and I mean to admit the company. [*AGNES beats the door.*] If you are found in my bedroom ! [*AGNES beats the door.*] Be quiet ! Imprisonment has proved before to-day a sovereign remedy for ill-will in women. [*A burst of angry voices in the King's Gallery. CHARLES opens the door on the right.*] What brawl is here ? Ah, Monsieur Marotte ! I might have guessed as much. Come in. [*Re-enter ALDRED wounded, between HAMILTON and a Courtier. After them BEAUMONT with the other Courtiers, and GABRIEL wearing the cap-and-bells with the bauble stuck in his girdle, and a rapier in his hand.*] Aldred ? Wounded ! A duel in the King's Gallery at Richmond Court. You have abused the liberty of the day.

Aldred. I crave your Majesty's pardon. The quarrel between your jester and myself flashed out upon a word the moment he entered the gallery. I could not refuse him, remembering the morning. Neither of us would brook interference ; and my adversary has handsomely avenged his former defeat.

Charles. And does my jester also crave pardon ?

Gabriel. No, cousin. I claim the privilege of my crown and sceptre.

Charles. A gallant fool ! Are you badly hurt, Aldred ?

Aldred. I think not, your Majesty, but my arm smarts.

Charles. Why then, since you have been punished, and

my ingenious cousin relies upon his irresponsibility, I must overlook the *lèse-majesté*. Send for a surgeon and have his wound attended. [*All go out except CHARLES, GABRIEL and ANTHONY.*] Well, cousin, you have proved your skill in fence; let us now test your wit. What are you—or rather what were you before to-day?

Gabriel. Anything. Say—a bankrupt.

Charles. You say that as if it were as much as to say, “I am a second Croesus.”

Gabriel. Surely. A bankrupt has nothing to lose and everything to win. He is utterly unaccountable. With bankruptcy and health a man may be as happy as the day is long: there is no independence like bankruptcy.

Charles. Then you have no ambition?

Gabriel. I have more and higher ambition than any man; but—I care not. As soon as I cannot with moderate ease of jesting keep sound flesh on green bones, I shall take an evening draught of hellebore and my ghost shall haunt a turnpike; for when the conditions under which we live become intolerable we should refuse to live.

Charles. If all the world did that same we should have the golden age.

Gabriel. Truly; for none would be left alive but the happy.

Charles. For my part I shall hold on to life with my last tooth, and when my last tooth goes with my gums.—But the question of questions. There are many rumours abroad, and the likeliest, I am told, sets you forth a

player broken in the wars, outlawed by the late usurper, and now a penniless stroller. Are you a vagabond?

Gabriel. Ay: man is an outcast and a vagabond. He wanders through eternity, the long lane that has no turning, and tarries at this poor-house, the world, to earn a mouthful of food by a day's labour. But here is not his home; and whence he comes, and whither he goes—ah, the old riddle!

Charles. Nevertheless, there are plain things a man can say of himself, which it were wise for you to say. There's a whip for the fool's back in England still, cousin.

Anthony. I'll warrant he has danced and sung at a cart's tail before now.

Gabriel. I can be plain, too, cousins both. It seems to me that I belong to the ancient order of ne'er-do-wells, instituted some forty centuries ago by one Cain, who was the first vagabond by profession. I, that am now the royal jester, have been pikeman, ploughman, usher, pedlar, sailor, beggar, King of the May; but always with a thought above my condition. The insignificant circumstances of birth, upbringing, and the scramble for pence, are not I: they are but the scaffolding. I am what I shall be; I am what I imagine. Moreover, I am the true heir of Sutton-Highcroft.

Charles. If you harp on that I must hand you over to Master Justice here. You have acquitted yourself to admiration, monsieur. Proceed as you have begun and your renown is established. And now, good-night. I fear

I begin to age, else a walk at dawn and a May-day dance could never have tired me so. [*Re-enter* BEAUMONT.] What is it, Harry?

Beaumont. Mistress Grey is nowhere to be found. When the surgeon came to Aldred he asked for her help, as he has had proof of her skill; whereupon her disappearance became known.

Charles. Very strange! Master Ashe, your suit is cold, I may tell you. I pressed it warmly, but roused only indignation.—Who saw Mistress Grey leave this room? No one? To be sure you were all engaged in the petty treason of Aldred's duel.

Gabriel. I faced that door while we fought, and Mistress Grey did not leave the room by it. There is a second door.

Beaumont. Oh, that is his Majesty's bedroom!

Gabriel. His Majesty's bedroom!—Locked!
The mystery is here! All powers of good
Vouchsafe that there be no iniquity!

[*Unlocks and throws open the door.*]

Agnes!

[*With clenched hands and set face* AGNES *steps into the room.* ANTHONY *endeavours unobserved to escape.*]

Halt! you that slip away, the damned
Procurer in this wickedness; here, now,
A reckoning must be made. But first I swear
By love itself, that though the seeming fact

Perplexes candour, she, beset by foes
Of virtue, trapped by treachery and pierced
With mortifying looks, cannot but be
Immaculate : I tell you this who know
Of lofty moods that England has forgot.

Agnes. What means this evidence? [*To GABRIEL.*]

You torture me

With patronage; [*to CHARLES*] and you with silence,
now

That one clear word would strike suspicion dumb.
Shame on all men who martyr women so !
Why do you listen while this mummer prates ?
What is he ? Do you fear him ?

Charles.

Oh! we thought

You knew him, Madam.

Agnes.

I believed I did ;

But no one owns a title to pronounce
Upon my doings !

Charles. [To GABRIEL.] Cousin, what you begged
Has come about, unhappily for you.

Anthony. This is the great pretender of his time !

Agnes. A mutable pretender ! At early dawn,
A tattered wretch, he tried to master me ;
He scolded me at noon, a transient king ;
And now a piebald charlatan at night
He gives me a certificate ! Oh ! Oh !

Anthony. A piebald charlatan ! To save his skin
He chose a life of patent infamy !

Agnes. And dared admonish me !

Gabriel.

If in this garb

My words are powerless ; if you will not hear

The jester, you will listen to a man

About to die ; for since [*to AGNES*] you know me not,

Only this hood I doff could snatch my neck

Out of the halter, malice is so bent

Upon my overthrow.

*[Takes off the cap-and-bells and throws it on the
table with the bauble.]*

But think not,

You whose hearts are dust, whose withered souls delight

To find men servile, I would save my life

By mean submission, were my life alone

At stake : by no expedient but this guise

Of folly was admittance mine to guard

Her unsuspecting nature from deceit,

From violence, already tried it seems.

Agnes. Why will you let him rave ?

Charles.

Be silent, fool !

Gabriel. No wrath of earth or heaven could silence
me !

I mean to rescue from my ruined world

Honour and happiness beleaguered here

By King and courtier. [*To AGNES.*] Even for one short
hour

To wear the motley and parade my wit

In worse than menial service though a King's,

And undertaken for the love of you,
Almost outwent endurance. What a hell
It must be then for her who holds her love
At the King's service, hatred in her heart
And horror of herself! But such a fate
Is lurking hereabout and vigilant
To find the moment. Noble women, one
With innocence, as holy, as secure
In panoply of chastity, as you,
Beguiled, immured, importuned, overcome,
Have lost their virtue, maugre heaven itself
Against that foul perdition in the deed
Besought with agony; and afterwards,
Afraid to die, have died a daily death,
Apprentices of shame. Leave Richmond Court,
Now, as you are! Escape the King's embrace;
And keep that sanctity of womanhood
Which in their hearts the vilest men adore.

Agnes. If this is not delirium, a rank
And working villainy, a poisoned lie
Ferments among us. Death for you? For me
The deepest wrong that women undergo?
What strangling thing has coiled about our necks
Unseen and silent? [*To CHARLES.*] Why is he to die?

Charles. He need not die unless he chooses death.
Among other offences that would bring him to the gallows,
he almost succeeded in persuading you that he is one
Gabriel Ashe, cousin of my good friend here, and your

old acquaintance. Upon a holiday proposal of mine he elected to shun justice ; but having now broken the condition of pardon he must abide the issue, which to judge by his inconsequent actions, and the vehement irrelevance of his speech, will not, after all, stretch a rope on Tyburn Hill, but provide a tenant for a cell in Bedlam.

Agnes. But this *is* Gabriel Ashe !

Charles. Come, come, Madam ! You declared him to be a pretender and a charlatan.

Beaumont. A piebald charlatan, a prating mummer.

Agnes. But that was in my bitterness of heart !

He found me captured in the very peril
He had predicted : in my pangs I shrieked
I know not what. But this is truth :
I never meant he was not Gabriel Ashe.

Charles. Madam, I respect the tender-hearted lie ; but it is too late now. Your first impulsive repudiation will stand against any after-clap of compassion.

Agnes. Why . . . Anthony ! This wild entanglement
Is now unwound at once ! Yes ? Anthony !

Oh, quickly, Anthony !

Anthony. What do you mean ?

Charles. Honest Anthony would willingly recognize him to please you, madam, but he cannot : his conscience dominates his love. [*Pointing to the cap-and-bells.*] Get into this again, monsieur, or—— [*GABRIEL takes up the cap-and-bells and the bauble : throws the former on the KING's bed and snapping the latter flings it in the fire-place.*] The

insolence of insanity ! Secure your prisoner, Master Ashe !

Agnes. [*Kneeling to CHARLES.*] To you, as King, the nearest God on earth,

I pray for justice : justice only, King.

You know as well as I which of these two

Is false. Do justice, King !

Charles. [*Whispering.*] Nothing is dearer :

But you can pay the price, goddess and queen——

Agnes. The price of justice !

Charles. Hush ! your beauty, pride

And chastity all given up to me.

Agnes. [*Rises.*] A royal price ! Oh, miserable King——

Charles. Hush, fool ! Betray me ! . . . It is told that you
And the true Gabriel Ashe were lovers once ;
This is the man you say ; why not insure
His life and liberty by marrying him ?

Beaumont. 'Tis common law, or commonly supposed,
That any woman from the gallows-tree
Can pluck a man by marriage.

Charles. Well remembered !

You barter Hymen's for the hangman's noose—
A fair exchange, indeed, when Love's the broker !

Agnes. I have offended him. Oh, Gabriel,
The world this morning was to me a book
Unknown ; my life, a foolish story dreamt
Out wrong. At last I understand like one
Who reads a riddle by a sudden light :

I have found the golden key here in my heart,
Where it has lain untarnished all these years.

You groped for it so arrogantly—I

Adore you, too, for that : but being a woman,

I fought against my master. Pardon me !

I faint when I remember all I said.

Gabriel. Offence ? and pardon ? What you do or say,
Though it may hurt me, since you love me, needs
No pardon.

Agnes. Pardon me : you must.

Gabriel. For what ?

Agnes. For—something in my mind. Nay, pardon me
For all my sins against you.

Gabriel. I pardon you.

Agnes. What else ?

Gabriel. For all your sins against me.

Agnes. Now,

Do you believe I may have sinned in thought—
Only in thought—against you ?

Gabriel. If you have

I'll punish you with kisses.

Agnes. And if not ?

Gabriel. The punishments of love and love's rewards
Are one in substance : you shall not escape.

Charles. How say you, Harry ? Another May-day
couple ?

Gabriel. What ! I am Gabriel Ashe, your Majesty ?

Anthony. Because a giddy woman loves him ? No !

Gabriel. Then since I know her safe and know her heart,

Send me to prison and let the law declare
Which of us two is honest.

Charles. That might be well—

[*Re-enter EUSEBY with the will.*]

Good Master Afterthought, you are welcome here !
 [To AGNES.] A faithful servant and a wholesome friend :
 I have heard of kings with passion overborne,
 Whom this courageous afterthought condemned,
 And was the more regarded. [To EUSEBY.] What have
 you there ?

[EUSEBY gives CHARLES the will, who glances over it and hands it to GABRIEL.

Do you know this?

Gabriel. It is my uncle's will !

Charles. [To EUSEBY.] How do you come to have it?

Euseby. Your Majesty,

Two drunken constables, ill-guided men,
Were found descanting on it in the yard.

[*To ANTHONY.*] Messent and Mowlem, sir.

Charles. Faith, and you did well

To bring it here. So, Master Ashe ; I think
'Tis not your cousin should cool his heels in limbo.
But if his May-day Majesty resumes
His sovereignty, on him devolves the right

To sentence this unconscionable rogue,
Who aimed to rob his friend of love and land.

Gabriel. Brother of England, I will sentence him.

[*To ANTHONY.*] For all that 's come and gone I think of
you

As one that loved me, was by me beloved.
The noblest natures sometimes are distressed
With hateful moods ; but never can succeed
In any villainy. . . . No more of this !
I am too happy to make others grieve.

Come, Anthony !

[*Holding out his hand to ANTHONY, who at last
takes it.*

My friend ; my love ; my King.



CHISWICK PRESS: CHARLES WHITTINGHAM AND CO.
TOOKS COURT, CHANCERY LANE, LONDON.



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1st Ed. d. imp. Feb. 28, 1915.

77 Charing Cross Road, London.



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